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EXTRA FEATURES & ANALYSIS

Andres INIESTA
Barcelona's reluctant superstar

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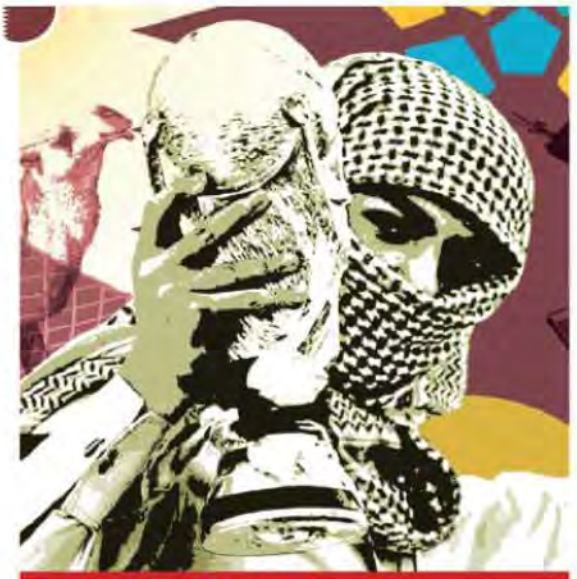

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In Pictures

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Hair raising... Ronaldinho made a successful start to his time at Flamengo by helping them win the first stage of the Rio state championship against Boavista

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Lighting up the sky...PAOK fans in celebratory mood prior to their Europa League tie against CSKA Moscow

Take cover...Pepe ducks out of the way as Espanyol attempt to defend a Real Madrid free-kick

A work of art...a tattooed Daniel Agger leaves the pitch dejected after Denmark's friendly defeat to England in Copenhagen

Splashing time...Ecuador's Marlon De Jesus (left) and Cristian Magana of Chile battle it out during the South American Under-20 championship

Blanket coverage...Twente substitutes keep warm in temperatures of -18°C during the Europa League match against Rubin Kazan in Moscow

Back to normal...in the first official game since the revolution that overthrew president Hosni Mubarak, Egyptian soldiers stand guard while Zamalek fans await the start of their African Champions League match against Kenya's Ulinzi Stars in Cairo

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FROM THE EDITOR

You will have noticed some changes to the magazine this month. We've added some extra features and, hopefully, improved some existing ones. Much has changed but much has stayed the same, and we still believe there is a place for intelligent analysis of the game in this ever-changing world.

That extends to tackling the issues that others ignore. Our lawyers have asked me to point out that Qatar did nothing illegal with their 2022 World Cup bid, nor did they break any of FIFA's rules. Whether it was a "fit and proper process" is another matter. Read the story on page 22 and decide for yourself.

> We still believe there is a place for intelligent analysis of the game in this ever-changing world

The choice of Andres Iniesta as our cover star is not insignificant. Spain's World Cup Final hero rarely attracts the attention he deserves but nowhere, in the English or Spanish-speaking world, have I read a 3,000-word essay that cuts through the hype surrounding the player, while also providing detailed statistical analysis of his career. Hopefully Sid Lowe has achieved that with his piece on page 46. It is a feature that we plan to run on a different player every month.

I would welcome your feedback on our new look and you can contact me directly via Twitter @WorldSoccerEd or via email, gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1. **FIFA to investigate two suspicious international friendlies that featured seven penalties** ▶ Page 30
2. Sepp Blatter admits collusion between Qatar and Spain-Portugal World Cup bids ▶ Page 22
3. **Brazil triumph again at the South American Under-20 Championship** ▶ Page 90
4. UEFA face backlash over Champions League Final tickets ▶ Page 76
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9. **Borussia Dortmund are on course for the Bundesliga title after beating Bayern in Munich** ▶ Page 60
10. Roberto Carlos attracted by Russia's new money ▶ Page 14

ITALY

Ranieri quits Roma after spectacular defeats

The "straw" that finally broke Claudio Ranieri's back and prompted his resignation as Roma coach was the 4-3 loss away to Genoa, a remarkable Serie A game in which his side threw away a 3-0 lead in the last 40 minutes.

Ranieri had presided over an ageing Roma side, seemingly held together by band-aids and duck tape. However, their spectacular defensive frailty does not explain the defeats to Genoa and Shakhtar Donetsk (3-2 in the Champions League), when it only required the opposition to score one goal for Roma to be plunged into total insecurity.

The injury-enforced absence of key midfielder David Pizarro (also often dropped by Ranieri), uncertainty about who was the first-choice goalkeeper (Julio Sergio, Bogdan Lobont or Doni) and reports of dressing-room indiscipline (the players reportedly refused a club-proposed pre-match *ritiro* – "closed camp" – in the wake of one of the defeats), as well as uncertainty about the club's future, may well all have played a part in Roma's loss of form, and Ranieri's departure.

To the surprise of many, it was the relatively inexperienced 36-year-old former club striker Vincenzo Montella, coach to one of the Roma youth teams, who got the call to replace Ranieri.

Within two days, Roma won 1-0 away at Bologna to move up to sixth in the table in a promising start for Montella, who left out his former team-mate and club icon, 34-year-old Francesco Totti, thus indicating that past friendships are one thing but present-day requirements may well be quite another.

Paddy Agnew

TURKEY

Freddy Adu moves to Turkish second division

The career of much-travelled and much-hyped American youngster Freddy Adu took another turn when he signed for Caykur Rizespor in the second tier of Turkish football.

Ghana-born Adu, now 21, joined Caykur Rizespor on loan from Benfica, following spells at Monaco (France), Belenenses (Portugal) and Aris (Greece).

After five different clubs in five different European countries in as many years, Adu's career has not so much reached a crossroads as a dead end.

For the youngest player to appear – and then score – in Major League Soccer when he played as a 14-year-old for DC United, Adu may never escape the label of "former wonderkid".

"He [Ranieri] keeps me on the bench when I've been scoring 25,000 goals"

Roma striker Marco Borriello bemoans his fate

"Legally they have done nothing wrong but it's a little immoral"

Barcelona president Sandro Rosell criticises Arsenal's signing of 16-year-old Jon Miguel Toral from the Barca academy

Unhappy...Blazer

FIFA

South America gain from World Cup status quo

South America was the main beneficiary of the FIFA executive committee's decision to stick with the same qualifying berths for the 2014 World Cup finals.

With Brazil qualifying as hosts, the South Americans effectively gained an extra spot at the expense of Africa, who kept five spots, but lost the sixth place occupied by 2010 hosts South Africa.

The breakdown of places is as follows: Brazil (hosts), Europe 13, Africa 5, South America 4 plus 1 in a play-off, Asia 4 plus 1 in a play-off, CONCACAF 3 plus 1 in a play-off, Oceania 1 in a play-off.

The main change in the format will be an open draw for the play-off positions. For 2010, South America's fifth-placed team played off against the fourth-placed team from CONCACAF, while Asia's fifth-placed team played against Oceania's top-rated team.

CONCACAF had lobbied for a fourth place but their claims were rejected.

"[I'm] really not happy with today's FIFA ExCo meeting," CONCACAF general secretary Chuck Blazer said on his Twitter page. "Everyone protects their own interests rather than doing what's right. Convenient decisions.

"In 1990, Africa, Asia & CONCACAF [had] 2 [qualifying slots] each. In 2010, Africa [got] 6 and only Ghana advanced in Africa. Why do they have 5 and we 3.5? We advanced 67 per cent."

HEROES & VILLAINS

RAUL

The Spaniard's goal for Schalke against Valencia in the first leg of their Champions League tie took his European goal tally to 70, equalling the record of Filippo Inzaghi. Some reports included a 71st goal, scored in the World Club Cup Final, as setting a new record.

JUSTIN HABER

Malta's national goalkeeper saved two penalties in his side's goalless draw against Switzerland in a friendly.

CRAWLEY TOWN

Despite being five divisions below Premier League leaders Manchester United, the non-league club went to Old Trafford in the FA Cup fifth round, at times out-passed United, and narrowly lost 1-0.

ALEX McLEISH

The Scot guided Birmingham City to their first trophy in 48 years with victory over Arsenal in the League Cup Final.

ADRIANO

The Roma striker had his Brazilian driving licence suspended after refusing to take a breathalyser test in Rio de Janeiro. Adriano, who has since returned to Italy, admitted he had been drinking but claimed he was not drunk.

DOUGLAS

The Twente defender was suspended for six matches after being sent off in a Dutch league game for throwing a mock punch at an AZ player. He then pushed referee Ruud Bossen.

SPARTA PRAGUE

The Czech club claimed their players Vaclav Kadlec (below) and Tomas Pekhart were suffering from a virus and that Croatian defender Manual Pamic had a knee injury and could not be released for international duty. However, the unavailable players then featured in a winter-break friendly for Sparta, against Zenit St Petersburg in Spain, wearing different names on the back of their shirts.

ALEKSANDAR & VYACHESLAV HLEB

The brothers were both sent off at the end of the Belarus v Kazakhstan friendly.

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"With great pride I can say I played with one of the very best. He will always be 'The Phenomenon'"

Kaka on Ronaldo

BRAZIL

Ronaldo's body tells him it's time to call it a day

February 14 is not Valentine's Day in Brazil, but Ronaldo was handing out red roses all over the place as he tearfully announced his retirement from professional football. He thanked all the clubs he had played for, all his coaches, those he played with and against, his critics and the fans – above all those of Corinthians, his team for the past two years.

Some had interpreted his retirement as the consequence of being hounded out of the game by Corinthians fans, furious at the club's elimination in the qualifying round of the Libertadores Cup. Ronaldo convincingly scotched all such talk, saying: "I'm in pain now when I climb the stairs. Mentally, I'd like to keep playing, but on the field your head is thinking one thing, you try to dribble the defender thinking you can beat him for pace, because that's what you've always been able to do, but you can't do it."

Referring to the horrific knee injuries he has suffered and the more recent muscular problems which forced him to miss so many games, he added: "I've been defeated by my own body."

Ronaldo, 34, also revealed that he was diagnosed four years ago with a hyperthyroid condition for which he was unable to take the usual medication as it is considered doping. There lay the explanation for the fact that the skinny 16-year-old at the start of his career had become such a bulky figure.

If he grew in size during his playing days, Ronaldo certainly grew as a player. Back in an extraordinary 1996-97 season with Barcelona he may well have been the quickest player ever running with the ball. With awesome pace and power he scored 47 goals in 49 games.

Proud to wear the shirt...Ronaldo holds a Corinthians jersey as he announces his retirement

In full flow...a young Ronaldo bursts through the Paris Saint-Germain defence in his Barcelona days

In Brazil, at the time, it was said that he was a one trick pony. Take away that burst of acceleration and what was left?

It was not an accusation that stuck for long, though. At Internazionale his strike partner was Christian Vieri, whose penalty-area prowess obliged Ronaldo to add more subtlety to his play. He became adept at dropping deep and slipping passes through to his team-mate. Even at the end of his career, with his mobility severely restricted, Ronaldo's intelligence and technical quality still made him, in flashes, a joy to watch.

From skinny kid to giant veteran, he was one of the great finishers, slowing down at the right moment as he bore down on goal, keeping his head still and picking his spot to slip the ball past keeper after keeper. And if he was never the greatest header of a ball, in all other respects he matured into a complete striker, one of the best to have played the game.

Along with the development of the footballer has been the progress of the man. The one-time gawky and awkward adolescent has matured into a citizen of the world, with life experience acquired in Holland, Spain and Italy.

In his own, soft way he speaks with firm conviction. He will now dedicate himself to his sports marketing company and has plans to launch his own foundation. And although he is highly unlikely ever to take up coaching, he could still have a big part to play in the game as an authoritative voice in favour of the players' interests.

In fact, amid all the negative publicity that today's top players receive, Ronaldo is a well-balanced and refreshing example of how the game can help transform a kid born in the developing world, with limited prospects, into a rich, intelligent, poised and well-rounded adult.

"I've given my life to football," he says. "I've made the hardest and most unthinkable sacrifices anyone could make and I don't regret anything.

"I've had a beautiful, marvellous, exciting career and it's hard to give up something that makes me happy. I've made lots of friends and I can't remember making any enemies."

Tim Vickery

"Apart from taking a penalty with a guide dog by his side, I don't see how he can score goals"

French TV commentator Thierry Rolland pokes fun at Marseille's much-criticised Brazilian striker Brandao

REPORTS

we couldn't make up

1 **Sparta Rotterdam are taking legal action to recover a valuable painting they claim was stolen during renovation of their stadium in the 1980s.**

The painting, a view of Rotterdam by JH Van Mastenbroek, turned up on a television antiques show, where its value was estimated at several tens of millions of pounds.

The 60-year-old man who appeared on the show as the painting's new owner says that he found it in a skip during the renovation and claims that he saved it from being destroyed.

2 **Ilhan Mansiz, star of Turkey's 2002 World Cup side, is hoping to become the first sportsman to compete at the World Cup and the Winter Olympics.**

Ilhan's performance on *Buzda Dans,* a celebrity ice-dancing TV show, went so well that the 35-year-old and his Slovakian skate partner – and girlfriend – Olga Bestandigova are now in training for the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

The couple hope to qualify for the world championships in 2013 and Mansiz says: "Maybe it will be impossible, but maybe we are writing sports history."

3 **Club Brugge sacked former national team goalkeeper Stijn Stijnen after members of his family posted comments on a fans' website praising him and criticising the club and his team-mates.**

Stijnen had been dropped to the club's B team when comments appeared on the messageboards at blauwzwartforum.be, calling Stijnen a "hero" and complaining about "lightweights" in charge of the club.

Stijnen's brother Steven and girlfriend Veerle admitted using the usernames "Frigo" and "Piop" to post the comments, saying they had done so because "the criticism of Stijnen for some time had been too virulent and, as brother and girlfriend, too emotional".

GHANA

Essien's international future in doubt

After two horrific injuries picked up playing for his country, the international future of midfielder Michael Essien is in serious doubt.

Not even the lure of a friendly against England at Wembley is enough to tempt Essien out of a self-imposed exile that stretches back to the 2010 African Nations Cup in Angola, where he hurt his knee in training and was forced to miss the World Cup.

"I will definitely return to the team at some point in the future – however, it won't be for the upcoming games," Essien said after he rebuffed an attempted arm-twisting by Ghana's new coach Goran Stevanovic.

"When I decided to take a break I knew some Ghanaians would be disappointed but I felt at the time it was the right decision after two horrible injuries," added Essien, who also suffered serious ligament damage in September 2008 while playing against Libya.

In contrast, Essien's Chelsea club-mate Didier Drogba returned to the Ivory Coast side for February's friendly against Mali.

"I'm not in the twilight of my career with Ivory Coast," said striker Drogba, who turned 33 in March. "I intend to participate in the next Nations Cups in 2012 and 2013 and I'm also going to play my third World Cup in 2014 in Brazil."

Mark Gleeson

WINNERS

PETR CECH

The Chelsea keeper was voted the Czech Republic's player of the year for a fourth time, equalling the record of Pavel Nedved.

BRAZIL & URUGUAY

The top two countries at the South American Under-20 Championship qualified for the World Youth Cup later this year and for next year's Olympics.

BARCELONA

Pep Guardiola has agreed to stay on as the Spanish club's coach for another season, signing a new deal that will keep him at Camp Nou until June 2012.

LOSERS

ARSENAL

Fans of the London club are still waiting for a first trophy since 2004 after losing 2-1 to Birmingham City in the League Cup Final.

BAYERN MUNICH

Defeat at home by Borussia Dortmund for the first time in almost 20 years loosened the defending champions' grip on their Bundesliga crown.

NAPOLI

Italy's remaining representative in the Europa League went out of the competition at the hands of Spain's Villarreal.

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"I'm in my last few months here. I can't continue in these conditions"

Sickened by the monkey noises made by Olympiakos fans during an Athens derby, Djibril Cisse vows to quit Panathinaikos

FRANCE

Moussa Sow taking Lille to new heights

Sowing the seeds of success. Ligue 1 high-flyers Lille certainly prepared the ground for a bumper harvest when they signed Senegal striker Moussa Sow on a Bosman from Rennes last summer.

As attracted to loose balls in the box as a magnet is to steel, the 25-year-old's glacial composure and deft technical address has turned him into a scoring sensation this term – he tops the league chart with 17 goals so far – and, given the confidence he is oozing at the moment, has every chance of finishing the campaign as the country's number one marksman, a feat achieved by just two other Senegalese stars: Jules Bocande for Metz in 1985-86 and Marseille's Mamadou Niang last season.

History has lost count of the number of prolific domestic scorers in France and Holland who would subsequently go AWOL on moving to one of Europe's elite championships – Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, Mateja Kezman or Stephane Guivarc'h, anyone? – but don't expect Sow to suffer the same anti-climactic fate if he should ever head for higher plains. Despite scoring the vast majority of his goals from close quarters, there is much, much more to his game than slipping the leash every now and again and poaching chances.

He is athletic and acrobatic – see the fantastic overhead kick he scored against Lyon this term – can work either flank, has enough skill on the ball and intelligence to take an active part in Lille's approach play, and does his share of tracking back too.

Flying...Moussa Sow celebrates his second goal of the game for Lille against Montepellier

"What makes him special is that he does a lot of different things and does them all very well," says Arles-Avignon coach Faruk Hadzibegic. "While his obvious strong point is his ability in the box, he has clever positioning, great instincts and anticipation and steady finishing. He can run powerfully with the ball, plays his give-and-gos and generally is unselfish. He's not the sort who expects others to load the gun for him. He's my type of player."

During three seasons as a Rennes first-teamer, Sow – born in Greater Paris to Senegalese parents – was a France youth and Under-21 cap before pledging himself definitively to the African nation two years ago. But until recently, he had only intermittently flared into net-bulging life, the high watermark being nine goals in the 2008-09 season.

So why the renaissance? The answer is threefold: Lille's forceful attacking style which fits him like a glove, the total faith coach Rudi Garcia has in him – contrasting with the ambivalence shown by Rennes boss Frederic Antonetti – and most importantly, Sow's burning desire to prove a point to his former employers. Effectively frozen out by Rennes last season after talks on a new contact ran aground, he is now very much a man on a mission.

"Meeting Sow's financial demands would have dismantled our strict salary structure and we were not prepared to do that," explains Rennes general manager Pierre Dreossi, who, ironically, is a former Lille defender and technical director. "If we'd given him his €100,000 a month, there wouldn't have been enough to keep some of our other promising youngsters."

So, to Rennes the prudence...to Lille the firepower.

Nick Bidwell

RUMOURS

we'd like to believe

1 Despite Dortmund's preference for a team of young guns, *Bild* is claiming that the Bundesliga champions-elect hope to recruit Bayern Munich's veteran striker Miroslav Klose, whose contract with the Bavarians runs out this summer.

2 Catalan daily *Sport*, which usually has its finger on the pulse at Camp Nou, reports Barcelona's enthusiastic interest in Udinese's in vogue Chilean attacker Alexis Sanchez.

3 Spotted at Lille's recent Ligue 1 match with Lorient were heavy-hitter representatives from Internazionale and Bayern. The reason for their visit? Lille's Belgian attacking midfielder Eden Hazard.

4 Sources in Belgium are pushing the line that Standard Liege's midfield general Steven Defour is top of the shopping list of Ajax.

5 After talking to Internazionale coach Leonardo, *O Globo* in Brazil claims the current European champions are moving for Santos starlet Ganso (below) and unsettled Sevilla striker Luis Fabiano.

"He stands for continuity, homegrown talent, passion and everything else that's good about football"

Hamburg supremo Bernd Hoffmann applauds his club's appointment of Frank Arnesen as director of sport

On the defensive... UEFA's Marchetti

UEFA

Fans' rage over Champions League Final ticket prices

UEFA has denied ticket prices for this season's Champions League Final at Wembley are overpriced after fans reacted angrily to the tariffs.

"We don't want to squeeze every single penny out of the market," said director of competitions Giorgio Marchetti. "It's nothing to do with it being in London and it is still priced below comparable events."

Marchetti was speaking as UEFA announced that ticket prices of between £150 and £300, plus a £26 administration fee, would be made available to the general public.

UEFA expect to receive up to £14million in revenue from ticket sales for the 2011 Final, £3m more than last year's Final between Internazionale and Bayern Munich in Madrid, which was the first to be held on a Saturday.

UEFA moved the Final from the traditional Wednesday evening slot to make the match more accessible to school-age children and Marchetti said it was still committed to getting young people into the stadium.

"That's also why we put some tickets for children at a discounted price," he said, pointing out a special adult-child combined ticket costs £340, which is a 50 per cent discount for the child.

Fans groups were furious. "These prices are absolutely outrageous and take ticket pricing to an absurdly stratospheric new level," said Malcolm Clarke, chairman of the Football Supporters' Federation.

"In a difficult economic climate, not only in [England] but across Europe, this represents disgraceful exploitation of fans."

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Only history will tell if this Barcelona side are the best ever

Arsenal midfielder Cesc Fabregas had just helped orchestrate a rare defeat for Barcelona in a pulsating Champions League second round, first leg tie. He was still drenched in sweat, but eager to pay tribute to his opponents, saying: "They are the best team in the history of football."

This verdict came from a player who has won the World Cup and Euro Championship for Spain in the company of several Barca players, and the cynics might say he was merely trying to highlight how special his own Arsenal team are and also to ingratiate himself with potential future club employers.

The cynics are wrong. Fabregas is genuine, and he is not alone. I asked veteran Denmark coach Morten Olsen about this Barcelona side a year ago and he reckoned they were a great team, saying: "The only trouble with watching them is that they make everything else second-rate."

Since then Olsen has revised his opinion. Now he says: "They are the best ever. There has never been a better team in the history of the game, playing so brilliantly and also winning trophies. Yes, there have been some wonderful teams in the past – Brazil 1970 and Real Madrid in the late 1950s, for example – but I think Barcelona are the best ever because it is so much harder to win matches in today's football. That's the difference."

Olsen is one of the few men to have both played and coached in more than 100 internationals, so makes a credible and independent witness.

Johan Cruyff is another proclaiming the eternal excellence of the current Barca team fashioned by the idealistic management of Pep Guardiola. His view is that they are already one of the three best teams in history alongside the 1950s Real Madrid and his own Ajax team of the 1970s.

Most British observers are unwilling to agree. Their scepticism stems, perhaps, from an ingrained mistrust of placing complete faith in intricate technique, close passing and a pure, artistic style.

It's almost as if Barca are too beautiful. Where's the blood and thunder? Where's the battle? Former Scotland striker and TV pundit Andy Gray typified this outlook with his comment that: "Barcelona would struggle in the Premier League because they never come up against the likes of Stoke and their onslaught with long throw-ins, and never get beaten up with long balls into the box."

As analysis, this was about as blinkered and barmy as you can get.

Others, more pertinently, point to Barca's narrow failure to overcome the outstanding defensive play of Internazionale in the Champions League semi-final of 2010 and say it proves they cannot be the greatest.

Well, that's two matches, one of which they won 1-0. What about the 16-match winning streak in this season's La Liga, breaking the 50-year-old record held by the 1950s Real Madrid? What about the 5-0 demolition of Real earlier this season?

Which is more valid? It's impossible to calculate objectively, although I'll give you one set of stats to chew on. The marvellous Madrid of Di Stefano and Puskas played 37 matches in winning the European Cup five times in succession, six of which they lost. Barcelona have played 34 Champions League games so far under Guardiola, of which they have lost five.

> They are still evolving and improving but are so beguiling and bewitching to watch

One beauty of this debate is that it has only just begun. For me, the very fact the proposition of Fabregas, Olsen and Cruyff is taken so seriously illustrates how far the current Barcelona team has travelled. The best? It is too early to say so. They are still playing, still evolving, still improving.

Most important of all, of course, is that they are so beguiling and bewitching to watch. If you like precision passing, delicate skills, energetic teamwork and master craftsman goals, then this team are a wondrous treat to be savoured simply for who they are and what they do.

As with Brazil 1970, and those Ajax/Holland teams, you instinctively know you are seeing something special. How special? That's for history. Barca are for now. WS

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"I was just trying to help him fly again"

Deportivo Pereira defender Luis Moreno after kicking an owl – the mascot of hosts Junior Barranquilla – during a Colombian league game

PERU

Neymar takes Under-20 crown

With nine goals for tournament champions Brazil, Santos forward Neymar was the undoubted star of the South American Under-20 Championship in Peru. He announced his arrival at the tournament with four goals in Brazil's opening game, a 4-2 win over Paraguay, and continued to sparkle throughout Brazil's successful campaign.

More stars of the tournament in *Talent Scout*, starting on page 66.

RUSSIA

Roberto Carlos lured by Anzhi

As 2010 turned into 2011, retirement looked an increasingly attractive option for Roberto Carlos. Aged 37, and a recent target for abuse from Corinthians fans angry at their team's premature exit from the Libertadores Cup, he appeared ready to end his playing days.

He had enjoyed a good 2010 campaign, his first back in Brazil since leaving Palmeiras for Internazionale in 1995, and was voted best left-back in the Brazilian championship, but he had also seen his team-mate Ronaldo, three years his junior, call it a day.

However, all thoughts of retirement were ended by an offer from Russian club Anzhi Makhachkala, who are backed by the wealth of billionaire owner Suleyman Kerimov and the money – £10million over a two-and-a-half-year deal – was too good to turn down.

"I learned of Anzhi's interest from my agents" he explains. "I had offers from many clubs throughout the world, but the offer from Anzhi was the most appealing.

"The conversation with the club's president also convinced me and I made the decision very quickly.

"I would like to thank Anzhi for their interest. I could tell immediately that I was dealing with serious people. I liked their project.

"I am going to a strong league which is similar to the Brazilian one.

"There are many interesting teams in Russia and the competition is very strong. It is a new challenge and a new experience for me."

John Holmesdale

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see clips of these goals, visit **www.worldsoccer.com**

1 JIMMY BRIAND
LYON v NANCY
A bicycle kick (above) every bit as good, if not better, than Rooney's the week before.

2 DIEGO PAIS
CARTAGINES v HEREDIANO
Spectacular overhead volley into the far corner.

3 WESLEY SNEIJDER
HOLLAND v AUSTRIA
Fine possession play by Holland is finished off by a neat one-two and volley from the midfielder.

4 JAVIER FARINOS
HERCULES v REAL ZARAGOZA
Left-foot shot from 35-yards into the top corner.

5 WAYNE ROONEY
MANCHESTER UNITED v MANCHESTER CITY
Perfect bicycle kick seals victory in the Manchester derby (below).

6 JOHAN ELMANDER
SWEDEN v UKRAINE
Allows the ball to drop over his shoulder before executing a brilliant left-foot volley from the edge of the penalty area.

"I'll be honest, there was a bundle of votes between Spain and Qatar"

Sepp Blatter admits there was collusion over World Cup bids

Treble... Platini was Europe's finest three times

UEFA

Platini revives European player award

The European Footballer of the Year award is back. UEFA president Michel Platini, a three-times winner of the original prize, will present the first of the new version at the organisation's annual start-of-term event in Monaco in August.

The European award was created by the Paris weekly *France Football*, in 1956, and has now been swallowed up by international federation FIFA's World Player event.

Platini says: "UEFA will give a special prize to the best European player to revive the spirit of the old European Footballer of the Year award."

Platini has asked ESM (European Sports Media) to participate as a partner for the award, which will be decided by a panel made up of a football journalist from each of the 53 members of UEFA. Any player, currently active for a European club, can be nominated, irrespective of nationality.

It will replace the existing separate awards given by UEFA to the previous season's best goalkeeper, defender, midfielder and forward. The presentation will take place in Monaco following the Champions League group-stage draw, on the eve of the annual European Supercup.

Gavin Hamilton

Paul GARDNER

THE VIEW FROM AMERICA

Whizz-kid Erik's case raises key questions over value of academies

I noted a recent 2-0 River Plate win during which Erik Lamela scored one goal and assisted in the other. Maybe you remember Erik Lamela?

In late 2004 the word was out that there was yet another super Argentinian kid, only 12 years old, but a left-footed goal-scoring wizard just like Maradona and Messi. Immediately there was a video for everyone to see: a slender, pony-tailed kid doing some impressively intricate and delicate juggling, and giving a cute interview in a squeaky, unbroken voice.

OK, juggling and YouTube interviews; but could he play?

Well, it seemed he could because Barcelona had already come calling, evidently sensing another Messi and making an offer to take the boy and his parents to Spain. Erik being too young to be paid, it was his family, said the Argentinian press, that would get £100,000 a year. And, of course, as Barcelona rather too cleverly pointed out, there was nothing for River Plate because, after all, Lamela was not a professional under contract to the club as he was still a minor.

This move was clearly counter to FIFA regulations for a player under the age of 18, but no one was bothering too much about that. River were incensed. "This is player piracy," said their president Jose Maria Aguilar. "And we do not accept it."

River made their own offer to Lamela's parents and the boy stayed in Argentina. He made his debut for the River Plate first team in 2009, aged 17, and is now a regular starter, which means, inevitably, that the Europeans are gathering again.

Did he do the right thing or did he make a bad mistake in turning down Barcelona? I'm talking here strictly about his football development, not his bank account.

Inevitably, Lamela's career is being compared to Messi's. When Messi was 13 he and his family moved to Spain, enticed by Barcelona with exactly the sort of deal that Lamela was offered at 12. Messi is now the world's leading player, so things could hardly have gone better for him.

It's quite possible that Lamela could still end up with Barcelona, but that may now be the wrong choice for Lamela has missed out on over six years of training in what we understand to be "the Barcelona way". He's had, instead, six years of the River Plate way – which may make him a less attractive prospect for Barca, even without the enormous expense now involved.

In short, to become a recognisably and actively efficient player in the Barcelona style, how many years of youth training does it take? Is it too late for Lamela to learn all the intricacies and nuances of that style?

The key questions are: at what age do kids acquire – or fail to acquire – the really important skills? And what about instincts? Are they born with those? Are the talents already in place by, say six years? Or eight years? Or is it later? Are they simply picked up, naturally, or are they taught? Indeed, can they be taught? Is there an age after which it is difficult, or even destructive, to try to alter a boy's playing habits?

> Lamela could still end up at Barca but it may be the wrong choice. Is it too late for him to learn the intricacies and nuances of their style?

I've yet to meet anyone involved in youth soccer who can answer those questions with any certainty. Yet the whole academy system is built on the notion that those questions have all been answered satisfactorily and that the academies therefore know how to produce star players.

Barcelona, of course, is an exception – it is an academy that can point to tremendous success in producing senior team players for a senior team that wins with style. Very few, if any, academies come close. Youth development is a mysterious area, haunted by the worry of some that there is not enough teaching and the fear of others that there is too much. WS

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"Dean was a colossus. He had so much ability. He was a leader on the pitch and in the dressing room"

Francis Benali, who played with Richards at Southampton

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

EUROPE

VINCENZO MONTELLA, a title winner with Roma 10 years ago and most recently the club's youth-team coach, has replaced Claudio Ranieri in charge of the *Giallorossi* until the end of the season.

ROY HODGSON, who left Liverpool by mutual consent in January, was named manager of West Bromwich Albion.

PIERRE LITTBARSKI, Steve McClaren's assistant at Wolfsburg, where he had also been working as the English coach's interpreter, has taken charge until the end of the season.

JOSE COUCEIRO, the former Porto, Portugal Under-21 and Lithuanian national coach, took over as Sporting Lisbon boss until the end of the season.

Palermo appointed **SERSE COSMI** as coach until the end of the season.

BORTOLO MUTTI, who was coach of relegated Atalanta last season, has taken over at Bari, bottom of the table, until the end of this season.

MARCELINO returned to coach Racing Santander, the club he led to a best-ever sixth place in La Liga three years ago.

LUCIEN FAVRE, the former Hertha Berlin coach, took charge of Bundesliga strugglers Borussia Monchengladbach.

JOSE LUIS MENDILIBAR, the former Athletic Bilbao and Real Valladolid coach, has taken over at Spanish strugglers Osasuna.

FRANK ARNESEN will become director of sport at Hamburg when he leaves Chelsea in the summer.

ALLY McCOIST, currently assistant manager of Rangers, will take charge of the Scottish club when Walter Smith steps down at the end of the season.

AMERICAS

EDUARDO BERIZZO was appointed coach of Argentinian apertura champions Estudiantes just before the start of the clausura.

Argentinian **AMERICO GALLEGO**, a former coach of River Plate and Independiente, is the new coach of Chile's Colo Colo.

Colombia striker **TEOFILO GUTIERREZ** joined Argentinian side Racing from Trabzonspor of Turkey in a reported £1.25million move.

USA forward **CHARLIE DAVIES** joined DC United on loan from French club Sochaux, 16 months after a near-fatal car crash on a main road near the US capital.

MIKE ADAMS was appointed coach of Honduras for the Gold Cup in June.

AFRICA

MARK HARRISON, the former Stoke City goalkeeper and Bangladesh national coach, replaced Paul Dolezar in charge of South African side Mpumalanga Black Aces with nine games left to avoid relegation.

JEAN-MARC NOBILO, the former Le Havre coach, who recently terminated his contract with Benin, was appointed Ivory Coast technical director to oversee all the national youth teams.

ASIA

MILOVAN RAJEVAC, who coached Ghana to the 2010 World Cup quarter-finals, has been appointed as national coach of Qatar, succeeding Bruno Metsu.

TITA VALERIU was appointed coach of Syrian Premier League side Al Shorta after leading the national side at January's Asian Cup.

AKRAM SALMAN, the former Iraq national coach, will take charge of reigning Iraqi league champions Duhok in the AFC Cup.

FRANK FARINA, the former Australia coach, has taken charge of Papua New Guinea's national side.

Borghi take over from Bielsa in Chile

Argentinian Claudio Borghi has replaced his countryman Marcelo Bielsa as Chile's national coach.

Borghi's most recent job was at Boca Juniors, where he left last autumn following a defeat by River Plate. He was previously in charge of Chilean clubs Audax Italiano and Colo Colo.

World Cup coach Bielsa, who quit after Harold Mayne-Nicholls was unseated as Chilean federation president, quashed speculation that he would stay on.

OBITUARY

DEAN RICHARDS (1974-2011)

The former Tottenham Hotspur and Wolverhampton Wanderers defender, who retired in March 2005 after suffering from dizzy spells and headaches during his time at White Hart Lane, died aged 36 after losing his battle with a long-term illness.

Transfers, sackings and loans

OUT

EUROPE

PAULO SERGIO left Sporting Lisbon after defeat on away goals by Rangers in the Europa League.

STEVE McCLAREN was dismissed by Wolfsburg after a 1-0 defeat at Hannover left the 2009 Bundesliga champions just one point above the relegation zone.

Injury-plagued former Holland midfielder **ANDY VAN DER MEYDE** announced his retirement at the age of 31.

LEONARDO JARDIM quit Beira-Mar after they lost at home to the Portuguese Liga's bottom side Portimonense.

MIGUEL ANGEL PORTUGAL lost his job as coach of Racing Santander following the purchase of the Spanish club by Indian businessman Ahsan Ali Syed.

JOSE ANTONIO CAMACHO was sacked by Osasuna after the team dropped into La Liga's relegation zone following a 1-0 defeat at Real Sociedad.

MICHAEL FRONTZECK was dismissed by Borussia Monchengladbach after a 3-1 defeat at St Pauli left the club seven points adrift of safety at the bottom of the table.

GIAMPIERO VENTURA left Bari by mutual consent after a run of seven successive losses in Serie A.

ROBERTO DI MATTEO became the fourth Premier League manager to be sacked this season when West Bromwich Albion relieved him of his duties after a 3-0 loss to Manchester City.

SERGIO ASENJO, the goalkeeper who joined Malaga from Atletico Madrid in the January transfer window, will miss the rest of the season after injuring his right knee in a 0-0 draw against Sevilla in La Liga.

AMERICAS

MIGUEL ANGEL BRINDISI became the first casualty of the Argentina clausura when he resigned as Huracan coach after just two games.

GIOVANNI MORENO, Colombia's attacking midfielder, who plays for Racing in Argentina, will miss July's Copa America after rupturing cruciate ligaments.

DIEGO CAGNA resigned as coach of Colo Colo, who are bottom of the Chilean apertura, after watching his side slump 5-1 at home to Universidad de Concepcion.

ADILSON BATISTA was sacked as coach of Brazilian side Santos after being in charge of the Libertadores Cup challengers for just 11 games.

RUBEN ROMANO was sacked as Santos Lugano coach after he criticised the Mexican team's supporters for jeering the players after a 2-0 defeat by Queretaro.

AFRICA

Nigeria full-back **TAYE TAIWO** has rejected a new deal

with Ligue 1 champions Marseille and will leave the French club on a free transfer when his contract expires at the end of the season.

ASIA

Thailand champions Muangthong United have dispensed with the services of coach **ROBERTO CARLOS DE CARVALHO** after failing to reach the group stage of this year's AFC Champions League.

Melbourne Victory defender **KEVIN MUSCAT** announced his retirement three weeks after receiving an eight-match ban for a wild tackle that left a fellow player in hospital.

THAER JASSAM resigned as coach of reigning Syrian champions Al Jaish after five successive league defeats.

Palermo sack Rossi after rout

Delio Rossi was fired as coach of Palermo after the Serie A side's humiliating 7-0 defeat by Udinese.

"He has a one per cent chance of staying. He has destroyed my Palermo," said club owner Maurizio Zamperini after the loss, which left Palermo in eighth place.

The next day the curtain duly came down.

Rossi, who was previously in charge of the likes of Genoa, Atalanta, Leece and Lazio, was appointed by Zamperini in November 2009 and succeeded in qualifying Palermo for the Europa League after a fifth-placed league finish last season.

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Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Distant fields continue to look greenest

The end of the England team is forever in sight. The fact that in South Africa Wayne Rooney, from whom so much was expected, played like a drain is casually ignored. Fair enough, one man doesn't make a team, and Fabio Capello's own stewardship was blatantly open to criticism, but when your own potential star turn lets you down so badly, after emerging as a teenaged phenomenon, all the well-run youth schemes in the world are not going to put things right.

The harbingers of gloom and doom in English football are always with us. The latest prophet of disaster is one Ged Roddy, the Premier League's Director of Youth. Yes, they do have one.

"If we don't affect things then English football is dead," he trumpets. "Forget it. We won't produce any players.

"You've got these highly evolved youth systems: the Spanish, the Dutch. If we don't put our own house in order, creating the right development structures, then growth in the number of foreign recruits is inevitable."

But what are the right structures? And would junior games against foreign clubs, which are now adumbrated, be any kind of panacea? When you have the billionaire Sheikh Mansour endlessly shoving fortunes into the Manchester City club, which once produced many fine talents of its own, what room will there be for home-grown products?

Arsenal, under Liam Brady, have long had an expensive youth scheme but, by and large, the mountain has nurtured a mouse. A very precious mouse indeed, to be sure, in the effervescent shape of Jack Wilshere, but he is essentially the exception who proves the rule.

You have to go back some years to find the talented but greedy Ashley Cole, who left for Chelsea under a considerable cloud, lamenting that £55,000 a week was an insult to his abilities. Years before that came one of the sadly few genuinely local players to shine at Highbury, in the shape of Charlie George. Wonderfully gifted in every department, with foot or head, passionately attached to the club he had supported since boyhood, a rebel and a dissident beyond doubt, who was unlucky to coincide with an autocratic manager like Bertie Mee, who would eventually drive him out of the club.

Exception... Wilshere

Jack Wilshere is very precious indeed, but he is essentially the exception that proves the rule

Even as I write, the news emerged that the Gunners are hoping to sign a couple of Swedish teenagers. Oh, and of course I should have mentioned Tony Adams, captain commanding, whatever his alcoholic problems and a huge inspiration in defence. But Swedish teenagers?

What of Chelsea, the other English club financed by a billionaire in the shape of the Russian plutocrat, Roman Abramovich? What has their costly youth scheme produced? And when, at long last, it does throw up a player, in the shape of the greatly gifted teenager Josh McEachran, how often does he get on the field, even as the team staggers from one mediocre showing to another? Frank Arnesen, once a Denmark international of renown, was spirited from Tottenham Hotspur, again at a large expense, but his years at Stamford Bridge have been barren. The best of the youngsters, McEachran, was there before he was, while several teenagers were grabbed from an outraged Leeds United, who had to be compensated, but what became of them?

Manchester United, inspired by Matt Busby and his Babes, have certainly prospered through their youth policy, from Bobby Charlton and Duncan Edwards, to George Best, Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes, though since that distinguished pair, there have been fewer and fewer such products.

West Ham United, inspired by Ron Greenwood as the academy of football arts and crafts, supplied Geoff Hurst, Bobby Moore and Martin Peters to England's World Cup-winning team. Since then, the excellent Tony Carr youth programme produces regular talent, such as Rio Ferdinand and Michael Carrick, but when it does emerge it usually has to be sold.

PIRES PROVES HOULLIER'S POINT

At Villa Park the other week I was delighted to see the 37-year-old former France international Robert Pires best known as a winger excel in midfield against Blackburn. I confess I'd doubted the wisdom of his transfer, given his age, but his fellow Frenchman Gerard Houllier has now emphatically proved his point.

GATTUSO REVIVES PAINFUL MEMORIES

The excesses of Gennaro Gattuso at San Siro, in the match against Spurs recalled all too many a memory of Italian mayhem, strangely and perplexingly countenanced even by such well-educated, seemingly moralistic, grand panjandrums as Vittorio Pozzo, who won the World Cup twice pre war, and Enzo Bearzot, who won it in 1982. Each of them seemed afflicted with what might be called moral double vision.

Pozzo brought over from Buenos Aires the fearsome Luisito Monti, alias "The Man Who Strolls", famous, or infamous, for his thuggery. As far back as the 1930 World Cup, the elegant and sophisticated France centre-half Marcel Pinel complained that he never got near Monti without receiving a kick or a blow of some sort. In a supposed friendly in Buenos Aires between Boca Juniors and Chelsea, Monti extended his right hand to a Chelsea player, then kicked him!

Yet Pozzo brought him, as an *oriundo*, a South American of Italian origin, into Italy's 1934 World Cup team in place of that cultivated, attacking centre-half Fulvio Bernardini, of whom Pozzo, as he himself told me, declared: "The crowds say, clever Bernardini, but you are holding up the play." Curiously, the last survivor of the Argentina side beaten in the 1930 World Cup Final side by Uruguay in Montevideo, Francisco Varallo, said in an interview before his death last August that Monti was so scared by death threats that day as to be inoperative.

A few months after Italy had, on their own soil, won the 1934 World Cup, the *Azzurri* came to London, where Monti was kicked by England's swashbuckling centre-forward Ted Drake after 90 seconds, suffered a broken bone in his foot, with lacerating agony, and limped off the field, telling Pozzo "he kicked me deliberately", which was always hard to believe at so early a stage of the game and which Drake, whenever I spoke to him of the event, always firmly denied. In any event, the *Azzurri* from that point on were "retaliating" and the infamous "Battle of Highbury" ensued, during which England's captain, Eddie Hapgood, had his nose broken. England, who were 3-0 up, eventually squeezed through 3-2, with *The Times* commenting: "Players who had previously run wild began to run into position."

Pozzo spoke several languages, above all English, which he had studied, together with English tactics, in years before the First World War. Bearzot studied classics at school but skipped university, preferring to follow his career as a professional footballer. As Italy's manager, he weaned the team away from sterile catenaccio and in his own words "disintoxicated" the players after the maelstrom of an Italian season. Yet he countenanced such hard men in his team as Claudio Gentile, who was later manager of the under-21s, and the canary fancier, Romeo Benetti.

Peter Barnes told me that when he made his England debut against Italy at Wembley in 1977, Gentile knocked him to the ground and snarled: "English pig!" You might say Barnes got away lightly by comparison with Diego Maradona when Italy played Argentina in Barcelona in the 1982 World Cup. Throughout the game, Gentile brutally maltreated Maradona, indulged by the feeble Romanian referee, Nicolae Rainea. One also remembers, in Buenos Aires in 1978, Benetti painfully fouling Arie Haan and later striking Johan Neeskens with an elbow. WS

Hands on...Milan midfielder Gattuso gets to grips with Tottenham first-team coach Joe Jordan

MISFIRING TORRES A HUGE GAMBLE

The £50million disbursed by Chelsea – or Abramovich – for a fading Fernando Torres may not have seemed quite so much as a hopeless gamble as the £30m, clearly at Abramovich's instance, for a played out Andriy Shevchenko, but it may well run it close. Does £50m for Torres make Manchester City's £27m for Edin Dzeko a bargain?

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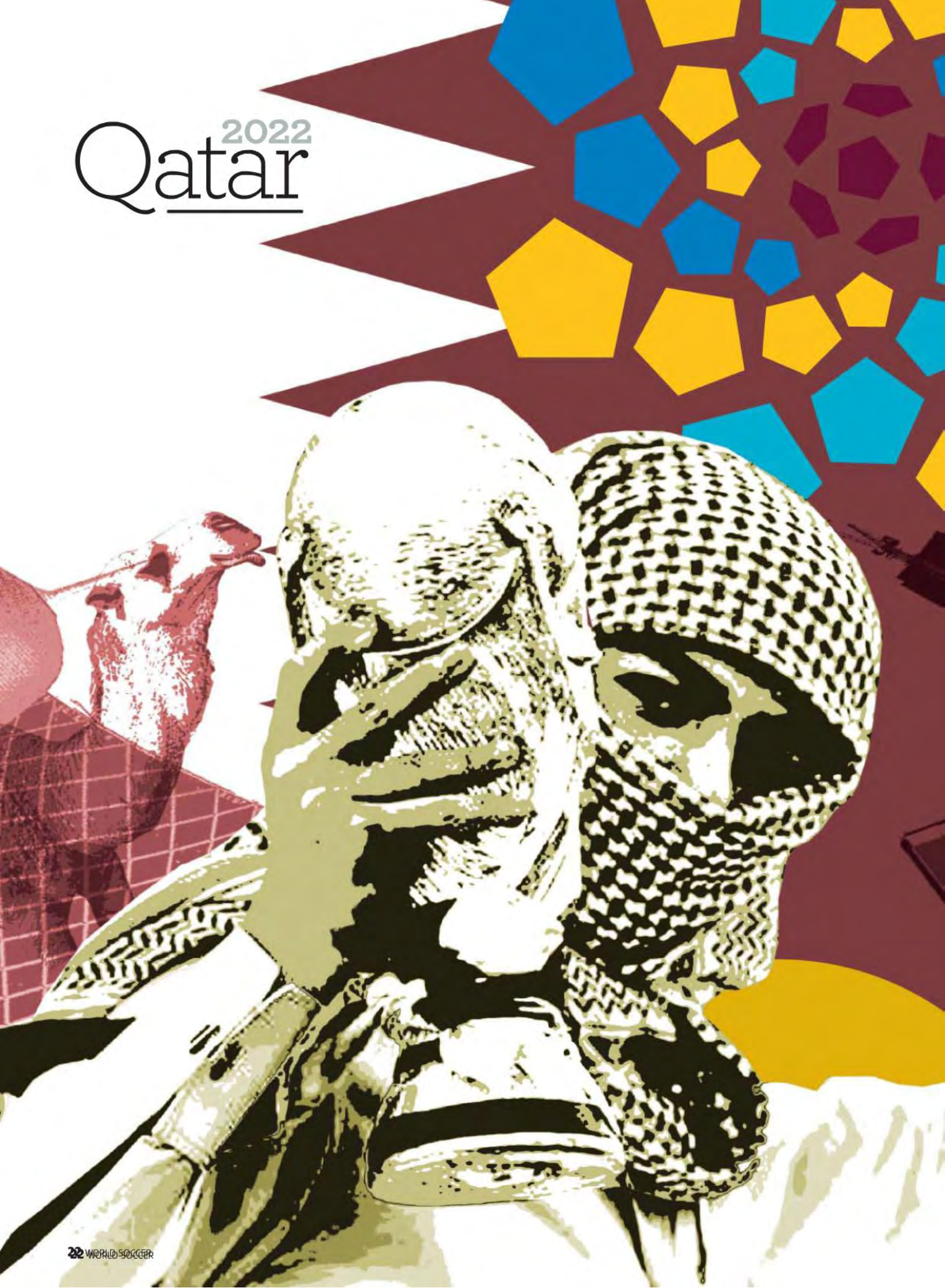
Qatar 2022



Mohamed and the mountain

When Qatar again failed to qualify for the World Cup, it was clear that Mohammed couldn't go to the mountain. In the end, as James Montague explains, the mountain would come to Mohamed Bin Hammam

The hangdog expression on the face of the future British king betrayed the truth long before Sepp Blatter opened the envelopes embossed with the names of the World Cup hosts in Zurich.

England's technically brilliant but politically obdurate bid had fallen short of Russia's lucrative 2018 pitch. Russia promised a huge, new untapped market for football and, more importantly, for FIFA's coffers. England offered the limp triumvirate of Prince William, David Beckham and David Cameron.

The press wailed and gnashed its teeth. Accusations of vote buying from the *Sunday Times* reared their head again; dark voices opining that vote collusion was rife. But the result, given Blatter had staked his reputation on shifting football's centre of gravity away from its west European heartland, was no real surprise.

But the next envelope was.

When Qatar announced it was to bid to host the 2022 World Cup, it was seen as little more than a joke. For all the talk of new, flat-pack stadia to be deconstructed and shipped to the Third World after the 2022 Final, and of Middle Eastern detente through football, there was one inescapable fact: a Qatari summer's day can hit 50 degrees Celsius.

The bid made fantastic plans for zero-carbon air conditioning ➤

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to overcome that problem. When the IOC was faced with a similarly ambitious Olympic bid for the 2016 games, deep pockets and a great technical report for the Doha bid wasn't enough. The summer heat proved a deal breaker.

So how has Qatar gone from Olympic joke to World Cup host in just over two years? The answer is that victory has been a long time in the making.

Ever since the country's ruler, Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa al Thani, took over from his father in a bloodless palace coup in 1995, Qatar has been on a fast track towards reform. Limited democracy and universal suffrage was introduced. The state censors were abolished and a new TV network, unencumbered by the heavy-handed censorship that bedevilled state-funded media across the Arab world, was set up and paid for by the Emir thanks to the huge, recently discovered gas fields in its territorial waters.

Within a decade Al Jazeera has become the leading media voice in the Arab world, with its coverage of Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution being cited as inspiration for the domino of unrest sweeping Egypt, Libya and beyond.

SOFT POWER

By the turn of the 21st century, Qatar had also realised the soft power that sport, and especially football, wielded. The goal was qualification for the World Cup, a chance to put its flag in the sand and proclaim itself a nation to be taken seriously. It was a journey that took the Emir, his charismatic son Sheikh Mohammed – who led the bid – and Mohamed Bin Hammam, president of the Asian Football Confederation who was seen as instrumental in Qatar 2022's success, to Zurich to celebrate their shock win. They have taken a circuitous route, and failed on numerous occasions, but when it was clear that Mohammed couldn't go to the mountain, in the end, the mountain came to Mohammed.

Qatar's first attempt at manufacturing an appearance at the World Cup rested with Manfred Honer. The German coach had led something of a nomadic football experience, spending the last few decades in countries like Peru and Nigeria. But in Qatar he had a wholly different brief, and it wasn't to coach the national team: it was to sign the biggest stars possible to play in Qatar's cash-rich Q-League.

He had already persuaded the likes of former Holland internationals Ronald and Frank De Boer, World Cup-winner Marcel Desailly and Argentina legend Gabriel Batistuta to make the trip to Qatar on tax-free wages that dwarfed what they would get in Europe. The money was so good that Desailly, who had played at the very highest level for Milan and Chelsea, could pretty much live off it for the next two decades. "[My wife said] 'Go on [go to Qatar]. We lose one year and we'll gain 20,'" Desailly said during an interview at the Al Gharafa training ground, arranged by Honer. "People work until they are 55 and I can give up after one year and start a new life."

The plan was to try to raise the standard of the Qatari footballers that played with these high-profile names. But it didn't work out like that. Fewer and fewer big names arrived and today only former Chelsea and Wigan Athletic defender Mario Melchiot would be considered a recognisable star in what has been rebranded the Qatari Stars League. Qatar's national team plummeted in the FIFA rankings from 61st in the world in 2004, when the huge investment in football began, to 90th. Honer resigned and a new plan was hatched.

Qatar always had some pedigree in taking international sportsmen and women from other countries and making them their own, especially in athletics. But then the Gulf state started to naturalise South American footballers to try to qualify for the 2006 and then the 2010 World Cup.

One example concerned Brazilian striker Ailton. The then Werder Bremen player had been the top scorer in the Bundesliga yet had never been picked by Brazil. Qatar stepped in and offered him the chance of international football, for a reported $1 million.

"[Naturalisation is] probably the only means to one day qualify for a World Cup," explained then Qatar national coach Philippe Troussier to French newspaper *L'Equipe*, clearly reasoning that the other way for Qatar to qualify for the World Cup was preposterous. "Naturalisations are nothing new to Qatar, 80 per cent of my squad were not born in Qatar."

FIFA recoiled at the move, even raising the length of time a player has to live in a country before he can qualify to play for his adopted new team to five years, but that didn't stop them looking elsewhere. Today Uruguay-born forward Sebastian Soria is the team's star striker, but the naturalisations haven't always gone to plan. When Brazil-born midfielder Emerson – not to be confused with the decorated former Brazil international – was naturalised and included in the squad to help bolster Qatar's chances of qualifying for the 2010 World Cup, few eyebrows were raised. But after Qatar beat Iraq in a qualifier in Dubai – for whom World Cup qualification meant more than just sporting achievement – it turned out that Emerson had played for Brazil Under-20s and was ineligible.

FIFA's rules state that a team fielding an ineligible player must forfeit the three

HOW A PROGRAMME OF SPONSORSHIP AND

GUATEMALA PARAGUAY

The ASPIRE academy established Football Dreams projects in Guatemala, home of FIFA ExCo member Rafael Salguero and Paraguay, home of FIFA ExCo member Nicolas Leoz.

SPAIN PORTUGAL

FIFA president Sepp Blatter admitted last month that there had been collusion between Qatar 2022 and the joint 2018 bid from Spain/Portugal.

ARGENTINA

Campaign documents obtained by the *Wall Street Journal* indicated that the Qatari bid considered proposing financial aid to the Argentinian FA following a financial crisis. This included a suggestion that Qatar's Al Jazeera purchased TV rights.

Former Argentina striker Gabriel Batistuta was hired as a 2022 bid ambassador at a reported cost of £1.4million.

2011 could cement Qatar's unlikely place at football's top table. Manchester United could well be bought by the Qatari royal family, while Bin Hammam could become FIFA president

FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT, FUNDED BY THE QATARI GOVERNMENT, SECURED THE 2022 WORLD CUP

SPAIN

Eight days after the decision to award the 2022 World Cup to Qatar, the Qatar Foundation announced plans to sponsor Barcelona in a five-year, £125million deal. Sheikha Mozah bin Nasser Al-Missned, wife of the Emir of Qatar, is the chairperson of the Qatar Foundation.

Last year, Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani, a member of the Qatar ruling royal family, bought struggling Spanish Primera Division club Malaga for £27m.

FRANCE

Former World Player of the Year Zinedine Zidane was hired as a 2022 bid ambassador at a reported cost of £1.9million.

ENGLAND

The Qatar royal family has hired a London-based PR firm to deny reports that it was considering launching a bid for Manchester United.

HOLLAND

Former Holland international Ronald De Boer was hired as a 2022 bid ambassador at a reported cost of £630,000.

THAILAND

The ASPIRE academy proposed building a football academy in Thailand, home of FIFA ExCo member Worawi Makudi.

NIGERIA
CAMEROON
IVORY COAST

The ASPIRE academy promoted its work through the Football Dreams programme in 10 African countries. Three of those – Nigeria, Cameroon, Ivory Coast – had members on the FIFA ExCo.

CAMEROON

Former World Cup star Roger Milla was hired as a 2022 bid ambassador at a reported cost of £31,000.

ANGOLA

The Qatari 2022 bid paid £1m to sponsor the 2010 Confederation of African Football Congress, giving them exclusive access to Congress delegates.

SOUTH AFRICA

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was reportedly approached to be a 2022 bid ambassador in exchange for a donation of £63,000 to his chosen charities.

points. But FIFA refused to hand victory to Iraq. Why? Because Iraq had not paid the fee for the appeal in time. Qatar went on to the last stage of qualification, falling at the final hurdle, and Iraq were eliminated.

But that hasn't put Qatar off from a very different type of naturalisation. In 2006 Pele and Maradona opened ASPIRE, a sports academy charged with picking up talented young sportsmen and women in Africa, Asia and South America, training them, educating them and giving them a platform on to the world stage.

A designated football programme was set up in 2007, now called the Football Dreams programme, to identify and nurture the best potential future footballers in the third world, especially Africa, and bring them to ASPIRE's world class facilities in Doha. While its aims are laudable, the programme hasn't been without controversy. In 2022, the graduates from ASPIRE's first intake will be 30, prime footballing age. And while the Football Dreams programme explicitly states that naturalising future Qatar internationals isn't the aim of the programme, they could choose to represent the country if they so wish.

"When making agreements, we are not ➤

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requiring them to play for Qatar," said ASPIRE sports director Andreas Bleicher two years ago at a press conference in Africa. "We leave it up to them. A player might be here for five years, and if he wants to play for Qatar, it is upon the player concerned."

Already the first ASPIRE graduates are beginning to make a mark. "The facilities you see are truly world class," said Wayde Clews, ASPIRE's Director of Sport, during January's Asia Cup, which was, for the most part, the first time many people were able to place Qatar in a footballing context. "2010 was a watershed year for ASPIRE: some of the boys coming through the academy have found their way in to the Qatar Olympic squad...eight were in the squad for [last year's] Asian Games [in China]."

But Qatar's decisions on where to invest in Third World countries appeared to correlate with the voting for the 2022 finals. Much of ASPIRE's money has been spent in countries like Guatemala, Paraguay and Thailand, three countries represented on FIFA's powerful executive committee, who voted on who would stage the 2022 World Cup. Of the 15 Football Dreams projects, six were in countries with FIFA ExCo members.

"Qataris and their proxies were quietly at work in the home countries of many of the FIFA executive committee members," wrote ESPN's Brent Latham, explaining how he thought the Qatari, rather than the technically superior USA bid, landed the 2022 World Cup. "There, they found ways to serve federations in the developing world in practical, even commendable programmes that seem to have won many friends and influenced a lot of people at all levels of the soccer world."

While Clews denies there is any pressure on the players to play for Qatar, neither are they dissuaded from changing their national allegiance. "There is no obstacle for these boys to go back and represent their home countries. It's an altruistic endeavour," he insists.

Done deal...Sheikh Abdullah (left) and Malaga president Fernando Sanz seal the former's purchase of the Spanish club

HUGE DEALS

We have been here before, of course. Back in 2007 it was Dubai and its billionaire ruler Sheikh Mohammed who was set to become the new power in world football. Emirates Airlines, bankrolled by the Dubai royal family, pumped billions into huge sponsorship deals, the 2006 World Cup and the naming rights to Arsenal's new stadium being cases in point.

But when Sheikh Mohammed's attempted purchase of Liverpool collapsed, just as the world economy was about to do likewise, Dubai's economic power was shown to be little more than a mirage.

Abu Dhabi's economic confidence was at least built on something slightly more stable – huge oil reserves, which Dubai lacked. But neither the purchase of Manchester City in 2008 by Sheikh Mansour, a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family and the UAE government, nor the capital's hosting of FIFA's yearly Club World Cup have come anywhere near the achievements of Qatar. After all, inter-Emirate squabbling – the United Arab Emirates is made up of seven territories with seven royal families – would make a countrywide bid for a major tournament virtually impossible.

Now Qatar has the momentum and 2011 could cement the country's unlikely place at football's top table. Already the Qatar Foundation has secured the most prestigious shirt sponsorship deal in world football with Barcelona. Last year, Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani, a member of the Qatar ruling royal family, bought struggling Spanish club Malaga for £27m.

By the end of the year Manchester United could be bought by the Qatari royal family, and Bin Hammam, could be president of FIFA following elections in late May. It might sound preposterous, but if you'd been told in 2000 that in two decades time the World Cup would be hosted on a baking hot peninsular, next door to Saudi Arabia, in the most volatile region of the world, you'd have thought that preposterous too.

The Qataris, and their money, are here to stay. WS

James Montague is the author of *When Friday Comes: Football in the War Zone* (Mainstream), a book about football and politics in the Middle East.

2022 WORLD CUP BID EXPENDITURE

*(Estimated. Based on figure of £27million reported budget for "communications" in final year of campaign)
**(Estimated)

PROFILE

The man who would be king

The Qatari president of the Asian Football Confederation is weighing up a challenge to Sepp Blatter in May

They were once the best of friends, but the likelihood that Mohamed Bin Hammam will stand against FIFA president Sepp Blatter increases as the April 1 deadline for the declaration of candidacies for the election to the top job in world football moves ever closer.

Bin Hammam has not, it seems, been discouraged despite the defeat of his recently acquired ally Chung Mong-joon by Jordan's Prince Ali bin Al Hussein in the fight for the FIFA vice-president's post that the Korean already occupied.

But rather than seeing the defeat as a chastening experience, and a sign that the confederation under his rule remains divided, Bin Hammam, 61, is pressing ahead with his plan to stand against Blatter.

During the Asian Cup finals in his native Qatar in January, he moved his campaign forward via choreographed encounters with the media. The latest step came with a declaration by Chung on Twitter in early February, stating: "I had lunch with Bin Hammam today. It seems he will challenge the FIFA presidential election in June."

Tellingly, the story was also carried on Bin Hammam's personal website, an entity that surfaced late last year as one of the first of his campaign building blocks.

Bin Hammam has to make his move for the presidency at the FIFA Congress in Zurich (May 31/June 1) or risk being a lame-duck president within his own confederation. The Asian Football Confederation – unlike FIFA, and at his insistence – has a three-term limit imposed on the post of president and he has entered his final four-year stint, having been re-elected unopposed at the same congress at which Chung lost his seat.

Bin Hammam's time at the helm of the Asian game since 2002 has, on the whole, been positive. He has overseen the implementation of the Asian Champions League and launched the Vision Asia programme. He was also behind Australia's move from Oceania into the confederation.

Rivals...Bin Hamman (left) and Blatter

He also insisted the AFC have written into its statutes that at least one member of the executive committee must be female, while also moving to improve the standing of the women's game within the continent.

Bin Hammam has followed a similar blueprint to that used by Joao Havelange, during his time as FIFA president, bringing in development programmes to share around the confederation's wealth and increasing the number of tournaments over which the AFC has jurisdiction.

The connection between the two goes back to the Qatari's earliest days of involvement in the game, Bin Hammam gaining the Brazilian's gratitude when he ensured Qatar could step in as host of the 1995 World Youth Championship in place of Nigeria at the 11th hour.

Since then, his presence and profile within the world game have climbed. He brokered the deal that saw the Emir of Qatar support Blatter's presidential bid in 1998, the Gulf leader granting the former general secretary the use of his private 747 to travel the globe canvassing votes. Now, with ambitions of his own for the top job, Bin Hammam has become increasingly frustrated by Blatter's continued desire to hold onto the post.

Those fractures became apparent during the challenge to Bin Hammam's place on the FIFA executive in May 2009, when he held on narrowly following a nasty election campaign featuring Bahrain's Sheikh Salman Al Khalifa.

Blatter, it was widely believed, backed moves to oust Bin Hammam and their relationship has been tempestuous since, with Bin Hammam regularly snubbing his former friend publicly and privately.

For all his achievements, though, the greatest feather in Bin Hammam's cap is landing Qatar the 2022 World Cup.

His power base, built during almost two decades of deal-making in the back rooms of FIFA, paid off and, as a result, there is a deep gratitude towards him in his home nation, members of the royal family publicly lauding his role in the shock win.

In return, Bin Hammam will undoubtedly be afforded the same levels of support the Qatari royal family gave Blatter in 1998. The gas-rich state rarely backs a losing horse.

Michael Church

THE RISE AND RISE OF MOHAMED BIN HAMMAM

MAY 8, 1949
Born in Doha, Qatar and grew up to run his own electrical engineering business

1972-83
President of Al Rayyan Sports Club

1979-83
President of the Qatar Volleyball Association; also president of the Qatar Table Tennis Association

1992-96
President of the Qatar Football Association

1996
Elected to the FIFA ExCo

2002
Elected president of the Asian Football Confederation

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RUMEN PAYTASHEV
in Sofia

Friendly referees under spotlight

FIFA is probing suspicious results of two recent internationals

Picture: Backpage Images/Imago

In February, in the Turkish resort of Antalya, the national sides of Bulgaria and Estonia played a friendly that ended in a 2-2 draw. There's nothing extraordinary about that statement – except that all four goals came from penalties, awarded by Hungarian referee Kolos Lengyel.

At the time, nobody disputed the penalties. All four – two each from Estonia's Konstantin Vassiljev and Ivelin Popov of Bulgaria – had been 50-50 decisions made at the discretion of the referee. It was only afterwards that questions started to be asked about the scoreline of a match that had been organised by an agency called Footy Media International from Thailand and Russian licensed match agent Viacheslav Protsenko.

Atanas Furnadzhiev, vice-president of the Bulgarian Football Union (BFU) was one of the first to raise concerns. "This agency is not from Thailand," he said. "It was registered in London. It is possible only the owners are from Thailand."

The BFU had agreed a four-way contract with the Estonian federation, Footy Media International and Protsenko for the organisation of the friendly, but the Estonian federation had raised doubts two weeks before the match and contacted UEFA and FIFA, who both announced investigations into the case.

The Estonians had no doubt that suspicion should centre on the agency in question. A local newspaper, *Delfi sport*, published a story, headlined "Fraud! Estonia v Bulgaria was a real farce!", in which it claimed that the result had been manipulated by Hungarian officials. "We will have no more contacts with this agency," said the federation.

If the four penalties were not enough to arouse suspicions, then the result of an earlier match between Latvia and Bolivia certainly did. That friendly, organised by the same agency and played in the same stadium three hours earlier, had finished 2-1 to Latvia – with all three goals again coming from penalties. The referee this time was a Bosnian, Kenan Bajramovic, who was also one of the officials for the Bulgaria-Estonia match.

"The four penalties in our game were strange," said Borislav Mihaylov, president of the BFU. "The situation became stranger with the other three penalties in the Latvia-Bolivia game. But there were no accusations of cheating against our players or the Estonian team. The referee can take any decisions he likes."

The man who first went public with the scandal was Mihel Uyboleht, director of public relations for the Estonian federation. He said: "We think the Hungarian referees ensured that the game finished 2-2. Several weeks ago it was clear that there would be something wrong with this

A TRULY INTERNATIONAL SCANDAL

A dozen different countries had links to the controversy surrounding the two friendly internationals

- Three match officials from **Hungary**...
- ... who have previously sent refs to **Argentina**...
- ... and international games in **Venezuela**...
- ... were, along with a ref from **Bosnia**,...
- ...involved in games set up by an agent in **Russia**...
- ...on behalf of a sports agency from **Thailand**...
- ...that was actually registered in **England**...
- ...to take charge of the **Latvia** friendly..
- ...against **Bolivia**, which was followed by...
- ...another friendly, between **Bulgaria**...
- ...and **Estonia** three hours later,...
- ...both played in Antalya, **Turkey**

Under suspicion...officials Lengyel (centre left) and Selmeczi look on as Estonia's Vassiljev (left) exchanges pennants with Bulgaria's Stiliyan Petrov

So you have to think all the penalties were doubtful."

Bulgarian international referee Anton Genov, who awarded four penalties in a friendly between Macedonia and Canada in November 2009 (two for each side) claimed it was possible that all had been legitimate. "There were also investigations into me," he said. "But eventually I was found innocent. All four penalties in the Bulgaria-Estonia game were a referee's personal decision. I can't comment on the accusations from Estonia, but if there is any evidence, they have to produce it."

Suspicions have centred on referee Lengyel, who was not on Hungary's official list of international referees. Indeed, it soon emerged that he had not officiated above the level of third-tier football in Hungary. Lengyel and Hungarian linesmen Krisztian Selmeczi and Janos Csak were struck off the local referee's list by the Hungarian FA.

Lengyel attracted criticism in December when he took charge of an under-20 international between Argentina and Bolivia. After disallowing a perfectly good goal by Argentina after 75 minutes, he allowed 14 minutes of injury time. In the 102nd minute, he awarded Argentina a highly controversial penalty, which they converted. In January, he officiated a friendly involving Honved and a Slovak team in which the visitors left the field before the end.

According to FIFA regulations it is forbidden for non-licensed referees to take charge of official international friendly matches. Hungarian referees' chief Laszlo Vagner said the three officials had not been sent by the Hungarian FA. "Whoever organised the match was responsible for the officials," he said.

"As long as I am the chief of referees, these three will never officiate again in Hungary."

The Hungarian FA had received a fax concerning the match, but the company concerned had proved impossible to reach by telephone and the fax went straight into the bin.

It has since emerged that Hungarian referees have regularly taken charge of friendly matches in Venezuela and Argentina, along with officials from Bulgaria, who also failed to inform their local federation. The Bulgarian officials travelling to South America included Luchezar Yonov, who was the fourth official in the Bolivia-Argentina Under-20 game refereed by Lengyel.

The BFU have banned six officials from the local referee's list, but Yonov said: "I am proud we represented Bulgaria on another continent.

"We are guilty only of not informing the BFU about these trips. But we have the right to referee these kind of games because they are not under the jurisdiction of FIFA and UEFA.

"We received personal invitations from the 'Exclusive sport' agency for tournaments in Venezuela and Argentina. The organisers paid for everything: flight tickets, food, hotel and €200 per match."

Lengyel must now await the outcome of FIFA and UEFA's investigations. If found guilty, he is likely to suffer the same fate as Ukrainian official Oleh Orekhov, who was banned for life after the controversial Europa League tie between Basle and CSKA Sofia in November 2009, when the notorious Croatian fixer Ante Sapina offered Orekhov €50,000 to manipulate the result.

Lengyel insists he is innocent, saying: "I am shocked by these accusations. I have never manipulated any football match."

It appears the chief guilty parties are from the Footy Media International agency, Russian agent Protsenko, Asian gamblers and the referees.

"This business does nothing but harm to Hungarian referees," said Vagner. "This was the work of a certain mafioso." WS

That's spot on... Latvia's Artom Rudnevs is delighted as the referee awards his side a penalty against Bolivia

Picture: Backpage Images/Imago

Nothing untoward... Estonia's Martin Vunk (left) and Dimitar Markiev battle it out – but the suspicions arose later

match. That's why we informed FIFA and UEFA and the prosecutor's office in the German city of Bochum began investigations. I don't know if the people from the BFU were informed about our doubts. Both teams played a real game, but the match officials are guilty of fixing the match."

The president of the Estonian federation, Alvar Pohlak, said: "What happened in the Latvia-Bolivia game confirmed our fears. We know there were higher than usual bets on both matches.

> "We know there were higher then usual bets on both matches"
> **Alvar Pohlak**

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SID LOWE
in Madrid

Racing certainty for saviour Ali

Santander's new Indian owner promises stability not superstars

Ahsan Ali Syed says he is not a magician. He has, though, been heralded as a saviour. The cover of the Cantabrian edition of the sports newspaper *AS* showed him beaming, a scarf held over his head, with the headline: "Salvador Ali". It took a little longer than expected, but by the end of January the Indian businessman's takeover of Racing Santander finally went through.

Ali, whose bid to buy Premier League club Blackburn Rovers collapsed last summer amid allegations of unpaid debts in the UK, where he had lived in the early 2000s, has not revealed the exact financial details of his takeover. However, he is understood to have bought about £6.7million worth of shares, assumed the debt and paid off the outstanding £1.5m owed to Spain's inland revenue. In total, the takeover is said to be worth around £25m.

The club's current president, Francisco Pernia, will continue at El Sardinero, with Ali keen to insist that without Pernia the purchase would not have gone through and that he will continue to play a major role. "I have enormous affection for Francisco and we have become good friends," says Ali. "For as long as he is in the world of football I want him to continue at the club. He will be my eyes, my ears and my voice."

While that seems to suggest a hands-off approach from the new owner – with Ali noting that he was "a busy man" with "many other things to do" – the club wasted no time in reappointing their former coach Marcelino to replace Miguel Angel Portugal in early February.

Ali says he hopes to feel welcomed in Cantabria and wants to build the club. Above all else, his obsession is to give it greater repercussion internationally, and this is a theme he has returned to over and over again.

"What attracted me to Racing was the name it has and the huge margin for growth that I believe it has," he explains. "It is well run and I hope to have the help of the local authorities and the fans."

He also insists his takeover is not a money-making scheme, claiming: "Football is not a business, it is a fun feeling; a way of escaping the monotony of everyday life."

Ali has his business base in Bahrain and claims to be a board member of over 100 companies, with his main concern Western Gulf Advisory, meaning he is worth £1.8billion. While details of his business interests have proved hard to confirm with any real precision and doubts remain, that headline figure has raised expectations.

Some may wonder whether Racing will be a new Manchester City – and if big-name stars will soon be arriving – but, in the short term, the answer is no. By the time the deal went through there were just over 34 hours left in the winter transfer market, preventing Ali from having much of an impact. However, Racing did sign Giovani Dos Santos on loan from Tottenham Hotspur and sought to bring Nikola Zigic back to the club from Birmingham City.

Ali says there will be investment for players in the future, but that the project will be relatively modest.

"This won't be a case of big names but of big talents," he reveals. "We will sign players with talent, and have talent through the club: on the board, in the financial department, in the structure.

"We have to build a stable club at all levels. Any sensible businessman would want to strengthen the youth structure. We must build the club bit by bit and make sure the fans grow with us."

> "I don't want to inflate this club like a balloon that then bursts"
> **Ahsan Ali Syed**

His message is sensible. There have been no bombastic statements nor promises, just talk of stability and, hopefully, of success not stardust.

Racing fans have largely welcomed the buyout as necessary, but along with the optimism there is also a degree of caution. The last time Racing were bought by a foreign investor, the Ukrainian-American Dmitry Pietrman, it ended disastrously with him taking over as coach and running up debt before departing for Alaves.

"I know what Racing represents for the region and historically for Spanish football," Ali says. "I don't want to inflate this club like a balloon that then bursts." WS

The only way is up...Ali greets the fans before Racing's league game against Valencia at El Sardinero

SAM BECKWITH
in Prague

It's cheers all the way in Plzen

The team from a city known for its beer are proving a heady brew

Plzen, or Pilsen, to use its English name, might be better known for its lager than its football, but the Bohemian city is certainly making its mark this season. Defying expectations, Viktoria Plzen were the autumn's outstanding Czech team and, despite faltering in the last few weeks before the winter break, they look well placed to celebrate their centenary year with a first league title.

Much of the credit belongs to coach Pavel Vrba, a Czech who made his reputation with Slovak side Zilina before heading back home in 2008. Operating on a limited budget, the 47-year-old led Plzen to a Czech Cup win and a fifth-place finish last season without compromising his commitment to pacy, attacking football.

Little more was expected of the side this time around, particularly when the disappearance of the Czech Republic Football Association (CMFS) deputy chairman Miroslav Kriz, in May last year, threatened to destabilise the club.

Kriz, whose whereabouts are still unknown, was thought to be Plzen's ultimate owner, despite distancing himself from the club when he was appointed to the CMFS role.

But it was revealed in August that a group led by businessman Tomas Paclik had taken control of Plzen 12 months before Kriz's disappearance, gradually bringing financial stability to a club that had been awash with debt.

Even with hindsight, though, there was little reason to expect a team made up largely of Sparta Prague cast-offs – key among them being veteran playmaker Pavel Horvath – to be title contenders. But after drawing 2-2 at home to Olomouc on the opening day, Plzen won their next 11 games, building a formidable 12-point lead over second-place Sparta.

A 4-3 defeat by Mlada Boleslav ended Plzen's unbeaten run, however, and further points were dropped in a 1-1 draw with Liberec and a contentious 1-0 loss to Bohemians 1905, allowing Sparta to move to within four points going into the winter break.

Significantly, Plzen's winning streak included a 1-0 away win over Sparta, which – because the Czech league uses head-to-head results rather than goal difference to separate teams that end the season on the same number of points – could prove vital.

Holding off deep-pocketed Sparta will be a challenge for Plzen's thinly stretched squad, and any injury to Horvath, whose autumn performances prompted calls for the 35-year-old to be reinstated to the national team, would be a blow.

The winter-break departure of two regular starters, central defender Jakub Navratil and defensive midfielder Tomas Rada to Turkish side Sivasspor, are also cause for concern. The return of Petr Trapp from debt-ridden Slavia Prague should provide adequate cover for Rada in the middle of the park, but Vrba must hope that Ales Neuwirth, newly signed from Ostrava, gels with David Bystron at the heart of Plzen's defence.

Less of a concern is David Strihavka's loan to Dutch side Willem II as Vrba has favoured a strike partnership of Jan Rezek and Marek Bakos. As back up the coach can now call on Martin Fillo, who returns to the club from Norway's Viking.

Encouragingly, three players whose autumn performances for Plzen earned them national team call-ups – Rezek, full-back David Limbersky and attacking midfielder Milan Petrzela – all look set to remain at the club.

One Plzen fan who is optimistic that Viktoria will claim the title is Czech footballing legend Pavel Nedved, who grew up in nearby Skalna and played for the club in his youth.

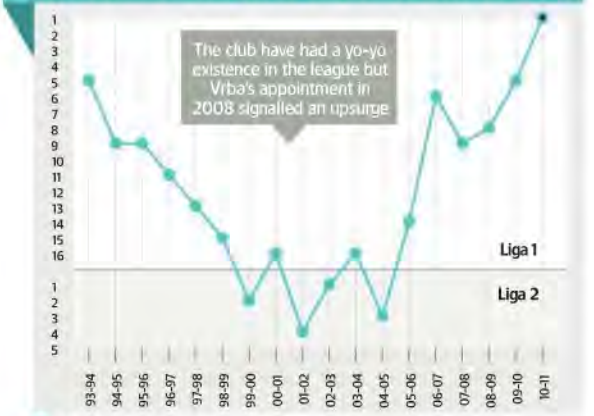
"I've remained a fan of Viktoria, I follow them and I know that they play excellent football," says Nedved. "And although I don't know coach Vrba personally, I think he's doing the right things. The team works well together and plays modern football.

"I hope Plzen maintain their form in the spring; I'm confident they will." WS

Point of order...Plzen's [illegible] Daniel Kolar and Pavel Horvath [illegible] take issue with Ibrahim [illegible] mate own goal

> "I've remained a fan of Viktoria. Coach Vrba is doing the right things"
> **Pavel Nedved**

THE FALL AND RISE OF VIKTORIA PLZEN



● 2010-11 season going into the winter break

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NICK BIDWELL
in Munich

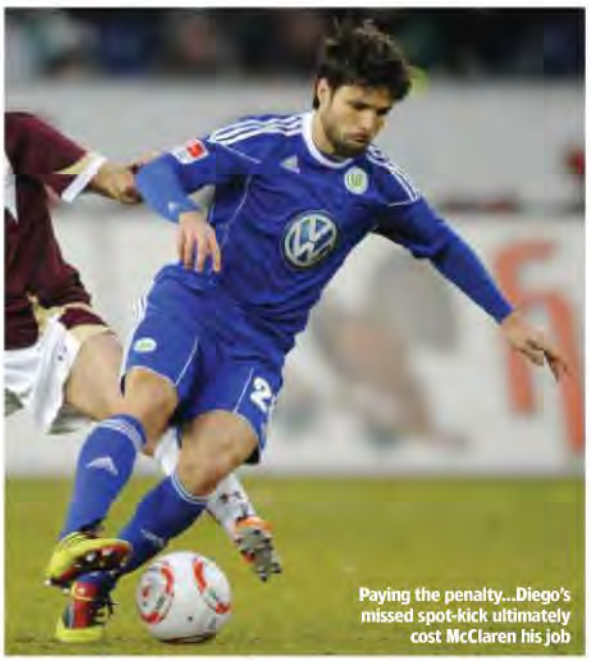
All over for McClaren

Former England manager lasted only seven months at Wolfsburg

Wrong man, wrong place, wrong time: that's the only conclusion to draw when examining Steve McClaren's short-lived tenure as coach of Wolfsburg, a half-season experiment which started slowly, then faded.

Despite boasting a squad crammed with talent, not to mention a clutch of expensive new signings (notably Brazilian playmaker Diego, a £12million purchase from Juventus), McClaren never truly got to grips with the Bundesliga and was living on borrowed time long before a 1-0 loss at Hannover in early February left his side just one point above the relegation zone.

McClaren, the first Englishman to take charge in the German top flight, justifiably claimed after his sacking that he had not been given enough time and was keen to point out that his side had only lost two of his last 10 games at the helm. However, the bottom line is that Wolfsburg were in such a desperate state that the club's movers and shakers – CEO Dieter Hoeness, club chairman Francisco Sanz and Martin Winterkorn, the head of the club's backers at Volkswagen – had no option other than to build the gallows.



Paying the penalty...Diego's missed spot-kick ultimately cost McClaren his job

In total contrast with the Wolfsburg side which had the entire country applauding as they romped to the Bundesliga title in 2009, the current line-up has proved nothing less than woeful this term. No soul, no conviction, no resilience – and far too many players choosing to fly solo rather than applying themselves to the common good. Just five wins in 21 games told their own story and when, as in this instance, you are the sporting face of a world-famous brand, the impulse to press the restart button is all the stronger.

Try as he might, McClaren was simply unable to put his own stamp on Wolfsburg. His favoured 4-2-3-1 system only sporadically bore fruit – mainly due to a distinct lack of penetration in wide attacking areas – while the proliferation of out-of-control egos in the squad served as slow poison to both the former England boss and the VW club's much-trumpeted ambitions.

> Try as he might, McClaren was simply unable to put his own stamp on Wolfsburg

Everywhere McClaren looked in the dressing room he saw trouble. Star Bosnian striker Edin Dzeko and Italian centre-back Andrea Barzagli, both of whom left in the January transfer window, for Manchester City and Juventus respectively, made it plain they were only there on sufferance; several other players spent the first half of the season looking jaded, disgruntled and semi-detached - indeed, Brazilian front man Grafite managed all three at once - and just

to make the atmosphere even more toxic, Diego was often in brat mode, selfish, ill-disciplined and, most annoying of all, unrepentant.

Fittingly, Diego's diva-like behaviour late in the Hannover game would prove the final, tragic act of the McClaren reign. After Wolfsburg were awarded a late penalty, the Englishman unequivocally instructed Patrick Helmes to take it, only for the Brazilian to seize the ball and slam the kick against the bar. The pictures spoke volumes. Before your very eyes: a leader with no authority.

McClaren found himself between a rock and a hard place. Hindsight says he should have stamped down on the dissenters, but in these post-Bosman days of unbridled player power the big stick can be a dangerous game. Why cut off his nose to spite his face? New to German football and with a hands-on technical director in Hoeness to contend with, the ex-Middlesbrough manager had to trim and be political. Thus Dzeko was made captain and Diego indulged, ultimately with disastrous results.

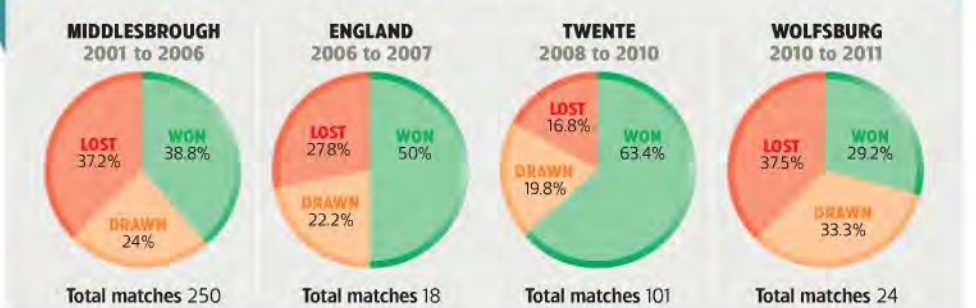
Aware that a certain number of his charges were beyond the reach of discipline, McClaren had to use more collegiate methods. With the aim of fostering unity, he insisted that the squad eat together, ordered every goal to be celebrated as a team and regularly prescribed motivational-video and discussion-group sessions, all of which was laudable and imaginative, yet ultimately futile. This season's leaders Borussia Dortmund and surprise overachievers Mainz, Freiburg and Hannover have all shown just how far a club can go if everyone is on the same page. The lesson has yet to be learnt in Wolfsburg.

In truth, McClaren faced an uphill struggle from the very start. At previous club Twente, who he led to the Dutch title last season, he could fully concentrate on what he does best: meticulously working on the training ground. Not so at Wolfsburg, where he would be more ombudsman and personnel firefighter. Effectively he was sidetracked and the strain was apparent on his face towards the end, particularly after a German Cup loss to second division Energie Cottbus.

If only he had been forewarned. In something of a free fall since their Bundesliga triumph of 2009, Wolfsburg have never been the easiest club to coach. With high corporate expectations and more money to spend on players than most German clubs (£65m in the past year-and-a-half), the pressure on the dugout incumbent here invariably takes its toll. Just ask McClaren. WS

Face facts...McClaren's tenure as the first English boss in the Bundesliga lasted just 21 games

McCLAREN'S MANAGERIAL RECORD



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PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

Mixed blessings for Berlusconi

It's 25 years as Milan owner but Italians are struggling in Europe

Silvio service...but Berlusconi has had controversies in his other role as Italian prime minister

On a snowy day 25 years ago, media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi flew into the Milan training ground of Milanello in a white helicopter. *L'uomo della provvidenza* (destiny's man) had arrived. Days earlier, the tycoon had bought the debt-ridden club from cash-strapped Giuseppe Farina.

Twenty-five years, five Champions League/Cup trophies and seven Serie A titles later, one can safely suggest that all has changed, utterly changed at Milanello. When Berlusconi took over, the club had not won the league for seven years and had not been champions of Europe for 17.

With his manic attention to detail, Berlusconi launched himself into the Milan project, heart and soul. Apart from the obvious matter of spending his money on a number of new players (one of his earliest coups was to snatch the talented Roberto Donadoni from under the nose of Juventus), his initial activities also ranged from sending his reserve-team coach Fabio Capello to Real Madrid to study just how a great club was organised, to chiding the Milanello gardeners for the amount of leaves and cigarette butts that dirtied the paths around the clubhouse.

Being a media tycoon, Berlusconi had plenty of ideas as to how the club might be "synergised" to fit into his Fininvest/Mediaset world of TV promotions, publicity and endorsements. Legend has it that on his first day at Milanello, Berlusconi took 1982 World Cup hero Paolo Rossi aside and told him that he would dearly like to make him the focus of the club's marketing and advertising campaigns. Three months later, Rossi, struggling to shake off serious injury, was sold to Verona.

To mark the official Berlusconi-Milan "silver wedding" celebrations, Milan wore a special white shirt for their 2-1 away win against Chievo, a shirt which bore not only the insignia "25 Years: 20th February 1986 – 20th February 2011" but also the signature, "Silvio Berlusconi". The years may pass, Berlusconi may these days be more than a little busy in his role of Italian prime minister, but the old sense of just when and how to exploit a Milan moment has never deserted him.

As he looks back at the Milan sides coached by Arrigo Sacchi, Capello and Carlo Ancelotti over the past 25 years – sides which featured Marco Van Basten, Ruud Gullit, Franco Baresi, Paolo Maldini, George Weah, Zvonimir Boban, Andriy Shevchenko and many other greats besides – Berlusconi might be entitled to wonder whether the current Massimiliano Allegri-coached, Zlatan Ibrahimovic-inspired team is quite up to scratch. Domestically Milan are admittedly out in front, but it remains to be seen if they are merely the best of a bad lot rather than an outstanding side.

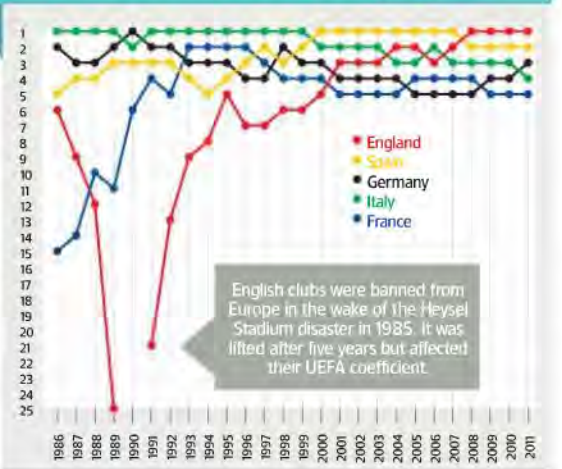
The biggest test of this current Milan's quality will come from – who else, at the moment – cross-town rivals and reigning champions Internazionale. Just before Christmas, Inter were 13 points adrift of their rivals, but a sparkling run under new coach Leonardo, during which they won games in hand against Cesena and Fiorentina (rescheduled to allow Inter to play in and win the Club World Club) has seen them close the gap to five points.

Like Milan, Inter lost the first leg of their second round Champions League tie to Bayern Munich, and it could be that the two Milanese cousins will have plenty of time to concentrate on the league battle in the last part of the season. In a springtime of disappointing European results, crisis-ridden Roma also lost their home tie, beaten 3-2 by Ukraine side Shakhtar Donetsk. A difficult February, in which they suffered three consecutive Serie A defeats (to Inter, Napoli and Genoa) saw coach Claudio Ranieri tender his resignation, saying the club needed a "strong shock".

> To mark the "silver wedding", Milan wore a special white shirt for their game against Chievo

Napoli's Europa League elimination by Spanish side Villarreal only added to the nation's hurt, and by the end of February, Italy's UEFA club ranking placed it fourth – behind England, Spain and Germany – which means that, even if four Italian clubs are guaranteed a place in the Champions League next season, by 2012-13 Italy will have just three sides in the content's top club tournament. WS

UEFA CLUB RANKINGS 1986-2011



ERIC WEIL
in Buenos Aires

Civil war breaks out at Boca

Boca Juniors have been split by a row between coach and star player

Hostilities have broken out at struggling Boca Juniors after tensions between players and directors, which have simmered away in private for some time, burst into the public domain and Juan Roman Riquelme was dropped by coach Julio Cesar Falcioni in a very public dressing-down of the club's best-known player.

At the beginning of the season, playmaker Riquelme was re-signed on a four-year contract worth more than £1 million a season. There was some internal opposition among Boca directors to the deal, which made Riquelme easily the highest-paid player in Argentina, but it went ahead nonetheless.

Riquelme played only one-and-a-half matches in the apertura championship because of injury and has managed only one appearance in the current clausura. His lack of fitness may not have been the fault of the club directors who agreed the pay deal, but these were the same people who employed Falcioni – a coach whose favoured 4-4-2 formation has no need for a playmaker like Riquelme.

From the start, Falcioni and Riquelme did not see eye to eye. Riquelme had got on with previous coaches who accepted his privileged position, but disciplinarian Falcioni has proved far less prepared to indulge the 32-year-old. In turn, Riquelme has not enjoyed Falcioni's heavy training schedule. They have had several arguments and a recent slanging match was heard from inside the changing room.

All the indications are of a bitter leadership struggle within the club, with several players seeming to listen more to Riquelme than to Falcioni. For Boca's fans, Riquelme is an idol, thanks to the success enjoyed in past seasons; Falcioni, on the other hand, is viewed with suspicion because of his lack of success so far.

Initially Falcioni said he would build the team around Riquelme, but he then insisted the club sign Walter Erviti – his star player at Banfield, who he coached until last season – who plays in a similar position to Riquelme but fits more into a 4-4-2 system.

Boca's problems were compounded by a rift between Riquelme and veteran striker Martin Palermo, who is known to resent Riquelme's lack of effort in training and the privileges he enjoyed under past coaches. The pair are not on speaking terms, though Palermo's poor form may result in his transfer away from the club.

Riquelme was injured again in this season's first game – a 4-1 home defeat by Godoy Cruz in which he was Boca's best player – but he recovered well and was soon training again and all set to play in the third game of the season against newly promoted All Boys. Falcioni, however, did not even select Riquelme for the bench.

Instead, Riquelme watched the game from his private box, and the fans showed their appreciation for him while also booing Falcioni off the pitch after a 0-0 draw which left Boca Juniors in 14th place, with four points from a possible nine.

"I am a fan of Riquelme, who I consider the best player in Argentina – which I think is a feeling shared by all our fans – and we hope he will soon play," said Boca president Jorge Ameal. "But I support Falcioni, who is the coach we have chosen, and I will never tell a coach what he has to do. Falcioni also spoke highly of Roman and I have no doubt that he is keeping him in mind."

> The club directors who agreed Riquelme's pay deal were the same people who employed Falcioni

Although Riquelme is injured again, putting the clamour to restore him to the side on hold, Racing have enquired about taking him on loan as a replacement for Colombian playmaker Giovanni Moreno, who was put out until the end of the season with torn ligaments.

Ameal and his committee, however, are unlikely to consider such a request as the political cost would be too great for them. WS

Ignored...Riquelme is out of favour with coach Falcioni

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HOWARD JOHNSON
in Paris

Blanc's Blues sing a happier song

The coach has reinvigorated the national side after World Cup fiasco

When Laurent Blanc first took the reins of *Les Bleus*, following the departure of Raymond Domenech at the end of the 2010 World Cup, it was hard to imagine a football team in greater disarray. A lamentable showing on the pitch during the tournament in South Africa, where France were eliminated at the group stage following three disastrous performances, was nonetheless overshadowed by a seemingly endless stream of off-the-field catastrophes.

The whole sorry show culminated in a shameful incident where the national squad refused to get off the bus for a training session in Knysna as a ridiculous response to suspicions that a mole in the camp was feeding the press with stories of disharmony within the group.

The French nation found such behaviour intolerable and there was intense pressure on its football federation to deal most severely with the ringleaders. Even the president, Nicolas Sarkozy, weighed in with his own criticisms before action was taken in August and four players were banned.

Nicolas Anelka received an 18-game suspension after being pinpointed as the principal troublemaker, while Patrice Evra, Franck Ribery and Jeremy Toulalan were handed five, three and one-match bans respectively. But new coach Blanc had sensed the mood of the nation before the punishments were handed out and made a pre-emptive strike before his first game in charge – away to Norway on August 11 – by announcing that he wouldn't select any of the 23 players from the World Cup squad, regardless of what the inquiry decided. As opening gambits went, it was both a novel ploy and a clever one.

By putting some very clear distance between himself and the South African shenanigans, Blanc was making a public statement that the France shirt needs to be respected, while also allowing himself the opportunity of getting that tricky first game under his belt without constant mentions of the mutiny. It also afforded Blanc the luxury of having a good look at some emerging French talent while removing any pressure to deliver a win in his first game.

After all, this wouldn't be the real France first team, would it? They lost the game 2-1 but, as perhaps Blanc secretly hoped, the result was treated as almost inconsequential.

The coach's sure-footed and innovative approach to his first test as national boss showed him to be a skilful diplomat – an attribute that is almost as important as

WHAT THE PAPERS SAY...

Après L'Angleterre, le Brésil! (After England, Brazil!) football

"I'm relatively satisfied with the French win, even though it must be said that this wasn't a particularly brilliant Brazilian side. It was an important victory for the confidence of the team and it was good to see some players establishing themselves as guys you can rely on."
Emmanuel Petit L'EQUIPE

UN VRAI BOND EN AVANT (A real leap forward) L'EQUIPE

"Even if *Les Bleus* still have ample room to improve the quality of their game they've at least rediscovered the winning habit. Which isn't a bad start..."
Patrick Dessault football

LES FRÈRES ENNEMIS
L'EQUIPE
DE MIEUX EN MIEUX !
UN SIÈCLE

Head of the queue... Brazil's Thiago Silva beats Adil Rami to clear a France corner during the friendly at Stade de France, while, below, Blanc hails Benzema's contribution to the Euro 2012 qualifying win in Bosnia

being a great coach in the high-pressure world of international football. But then again, "*Le President*", as he is known, has always been a canny operator.

Whether marshalling the defence of the national team or any number of club sides during his glorious playing days, or leading Bordeaux to the French league title as coach in 2009 after the club had previously flirted with relegation, Blanc has always come across as cool, calm and very collected, a guy who knows his mind and who knows his stuff.

Blanc is as close to a national footballing treasure as you can get, and both his CV and character ensured there was not a single dissenting voice in France when he was given the top job. His is a reputation that could so easily be ruined, as happened so comprehensively to Domenech before him, yet he is dismissive of the idea.

"I couldn't care less about that," Blanc said back in August. "There are exciting challenges out there and you take them on without thinking about your reputation or your career. Otherwise you'd do nothing in life."

Which is easy to say, but Blanc would not have been human if he had had no doubts after his team went down 1-0 at home to Belarus in September in a Euro 2012 qualifying game in just his second match in charge. Despite a team that featured only four of the players – Hugo Lloris, Bacary Sagna, Gael Clichy and Abou Diaby – who appeared in France's final World Cup game against South Africa, a truly insipid display at the Stade de France ended in defeat.

"This loss against an average Belarus team has confirmed that French football has sunk to new depths," screamed *France Football*. Blanc refused to flap though, claiming that "the best medicine is a win", even if some journalist wag claimed: "this team doesn't even know how to conjugate the verb 'to win'."

Blanc, however, already had a clear idea of what he had at his disposal, saying: "Right now France has good but not great players, together with some youngsters who have some potential that's interesting. That's all. When it comes to the national team, having good players isn't enough. Above all you have to build a team – and I've got to do it quickly."

> "There are exciting challenges out there and you take them without thinking about your reputation or your career"
> **Laurent Blanc**

Did Blanc know something the journalists didn't? It would certainly seem so, for four days later the sound of humble pie being munched must surely have been heard all the way down the Champs Elysees as France faced a tricky tie in Bosnia-Herzegovina, yet came away with a splendid 2-0 victory. The architect of the win? Striker Karim Benzema, who led the line brilliantly and scored a superb opening goal to make a mockery of his well-publicised difficulties with club side Real Madrid.

Blanc had already made a point of calling Benzema back into the national squad for that first match against Norway after the former Lyon man had surprisingly been left out of the World Cup squad by Domenech.

"Karim's some way ahead of our other strikers," explained Blanc after the Bosnia game, and the 23-year-old has since more than justified the coach's faith in him, scoring in France's last three matches, against Luxembourg, England and Brazil. No French player has done that since David Trezeguet way back in 2003.

But it's not just Benzema who Blanc has been able to galvanise. Since the Belarus defeat, France have won five on the bounce, conceding just one goal in the process (against England at Wembley in November when they totally outplayed Fabio Capello's side). When you consider that this winning streak has also put France top of Group D in the Euro 2012 qualifiers, it is not hard to see why many feel Blanc is the most promising new European manager since Jose Mourinho.

Blanc has rebuilt France in his own image to some degree, creating a central defensive partnership between Philippe Mexes and Adil Rami that has been seriously impressive. Domenech never found the right combination in the heart of his back four, but Blanc seems to have done it with ease.

Elsewhere, Yann M'Vila looks like a midfield enforcer of huge potential, Benzema is terrorising defences and Roma's Jeremy Menez on the right flank showed against Brazil that he may finally be able to fulfil the huge potential he showed as a youngster. His burst down the wing and cross for Benzema's winning goal in a 1-0 victory was a joy to watch.

"Karim's like a brother to me," said Menez after the game. This may well be true, but Blanc is rapidly making his mark as a father figure for a new and exciting France side. WS

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MARK GLEESON

Like father, like sons

Three brothers carry the hopes of the 2012 African Nations Cup co-hosts

When Gabon qualified for their first African Nations Cup finals, in Tunisia in 1994, their captain – and only recognised star – was the elegant 28-year-old schemer Pierre Aubame. Almost two decades on, Gabon are to co-host the next Nations Cup finals, in tandem with Equatorial Guinea, in January 2012, and Aubame's three sons are likely to be key elements of the *Azingo Nationale* (black panthers) squad.

The siblings are better known by the surname Aubameyang, which is an administrative amalgamation of their father's and their paternal grandmother's surnames. In a remarkable footballing family dynasty, 22-year-old striker Pierre-Emerick and midfielder Willy, 24, feature regularly for the national side, while 27-year-old defender Catilina hasn't given up hope of adding to his four caps.

All three were brought up at Milanello, during the 10 years their father spent as a scout for Milan, and showed huge talent as teenagers.

Catilina was born in Libreville but brought up in France where his father played for Laval, Le Havre, Toulouse and Nice from 1984 to 1998. Catilina played one game in the UEFA Cup for Milan in 2001 and also appeared in the Champions League the following year, but made just one Serie A start before being loaned out to a series of clubs. Although capped by France at Under-19 level, a change in FIFA nationalities rules later allowed him to swap allegiance to Gabon.

> "I explained to the boys the pros and cons of France and Gabon's national sides...with some bias, I must admit"
> **Pierre Aubame**

Taking the air...Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (centre) is challenged by DR Congo's Landry Mulemo in a friendly

He is currently with French amateur side GFCO Ajaccio.

Willy and Pierre-Emerick were both born in Paris, and Willy also made it to the fringes of the Milan side, making a single appearance in an Italian Cup game in 2007. He was on the bench for several Serie A matches, and even scored in a friendly against Juventus, but he was later loaned out to Avellino, Belgian club Eupen, Monza and is now with Kilmarnock in Scotland.

Pierre-Emerick, meanwhile, is arguably the most promising of the trio and is under contract with Milan until 2013. A prolific goalscorer with the club's juniors, he has had spells on loan to Dijon, Lille and Monaco, and joined Saint-Etienne in January.

He initially turned down approaches from Gabon and chose France over Italy at Under-21 level, making his debut in a friendly in February 2009. However, only one month later he was in the Gabon side that played Morocco in a World Cup qualifier, thereby finally committing his international future to the central African nation.

"The boys do listen to me and what I say has some influence," says Aubame of his sons' decisions. "I explained to them the pros and cons of both national sides, France and Gabon...with some bias, I must admit."

Aubame, who coached Gabon in February's African Nations Championship for domestic-based players and is now back in Libreville himself, says his boys did not take long to realise that their international futures lay with Gabon, adding: "We all had dreams and then one day we decided we were going to chase them."

That Gabon will co-host next year's Nations Cup must have helped the Aubameyang boys make up their minds, but the experience of Milan's latest African acquisition, Kevin-Prince Boateng, has also shown what can be achieved as he went from a loan spell at Portsmouth to Ghana international, World Cup hero and a Serie A regular in just six months. WS

STEVE MENARY

Untapped pool of talent

Islanders hope to make a splash at the Indian Ocean Games

As a French department, Reunion is only an associate member of CAF and is therefore unable to join FIFA and take part in the World Cup qualifying tournament. That does not, however, totally exclude the Indian Ocean island from continental competition.

While club sides from Reunion are eligible to play in the CAF Champions League and Confederations Cup – they also enter the French Cup – the national side takes part in regional tournaments such as the Indian Ocean Games, which it won in 1979, 1998 and 2007.

This year's Games are being held in the Seychelles and another football gold in August would go some way to compensating for the island's loss at the Coupe de l'Outre Mer, a biennial tournament for French colonies held in Paris that was started by the amateur wing of the French Football Federation (FFF).

Reunion won the inaugural competition in 2008, beating Martinique 1-0 in the Final, but lost 5-3 on penalties to the same Caribbean department at the second event last year in Paris.

The tournament is restricted to local players, but an estimated 32,000 people out of a population of little more than 800,000 play football in Reunion, which has 110 clubs. The Ligue Reunionnaise de Football has four tiers with 14 clubs in the Premier League – which forms part of the sixth tier of the French league – and a dozen in the second division. Below these are three regional leagues, each comprising 14 teams, and then a fourth tier of four leagues, again regionally based and each with 10 teams.

Island games... Saint-Pierrois (in white) take on Saint-Louis

> Reunion-born players Guillaume Hoarau and Dimitri Payet have both been capped by France

For last year's Coupe de l'Outre Mer, manager Jean-Pierre Bade called up 18 players from seven clubs, with the largest contingent (six) coming from the club that is traditionally the island's strongest: last year's Premier League champions US Stade Tamponnaise.

Tamponnaise have played in a number of CAF competitions in the past, but money remains a perennial problem for football in Reunion. The FFF is doing its best to help, however, providing £1,000 in funding for each player that went to the Coupe de l'Outre Mer.

While the league is officially amateur, rumours of financial assistance abound in a competition that attracted the Cameroon World Cup legend Roger Milla in the late 1980s.

Milla turned out for JS Saint-Pierroise, who later won the league in 2008 to break Tamponnaise's dominance of the domestic scene. That victory was inspired by one of the island's most famous players, Didier Agathe, whose career took him to Montpellier, Celtic and Aston Villa before he returned home.

Reunion-born players Guillaume Hoarau of Paris Saint-Germain and Saint-Etienne's Dimitri Payet have both been capped by France at international level recently and Agathe, who still plays for Saint-Pierroise, is using his contacts to help his club's players further their careers.

Only last summer, three Saint-Pierroise players – Jerome Heekeng, Yohan Mathis and Jeremy Judith – signed for Scottish Division One side Stirling Albion.

Although Judith and Mathis made just one substitute appearance between them before returning home in November, 25-year-old midfielder Heekeng is a regular starter and has become a big hit with Albion fans, suggesting there is still untapped quality to be found in Reunion. WS

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Reunion is a French island in the Indian Ocean, east of Madagascar. The weather is cool and dry from May to November, and hot and rainy from November to April.

Population	827,000
Size	970 square miles
Capital	Saint Denis
Language	French
Religion	Roman Catholicism

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JAMES GOYDER
in Bangkok

Product placement reaps benefits

Investment has made the Thai Premier League stronger

English football has always been hugely popular in Thailand and in recent years that interest has manifested itself in some extensive corporate investment. Endorsements from local beer Singha are worth a combined total of £15million to Chelsea and Manchester United, while the £8m deal that sees Everton wear the name of another Thai beer, Chang, on their shirts is the most lucrative in the club's history.

Manchester City, meanwhile, were famously purchased by the former Thai prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, in June 2007 – and then sold to Sheikh Mansour a year later for a £130m profit – while a Thai-led consortium took over at Leicester City last year.

In the past, Thailand's fascination with the English game has probably had an adverse affect on its development at home. Speaking soon after his appointment as coach of the national team, Peter Reid expressed his disappointment with the standard of club football in the country, saying: "The national league has got to improve. The top countries in the world have the top leagues: England, Italy, Spain.

"The Thai national league has to improve to give the national team a chance to improve."

Reid has long since been replaced by another former England international, Bryan Robson, but domestic football in Thailand has improved dramatically in the intervening year – something Reid's successor feels is partly due to a much-needed influx of investment,

"I think the Thai Premier League is definitely getting stronger and, for whatever reason, there has been a boom in sponsorship which has given the clubs better finances," says Robson. "Nearly all the best Thai players were playing abroad, but now the clubs have the finances to bring them back into Thailand which has improved the league."

When Reid was in charge, eight members of his squad were plying their trade overseas. Now Surat Sukha, who plays for Melbourne Victory in the Australian A League, is the only top Thai player not currently contracted to a club in the Thai Premier League.

Attendances are rising, wages are increasing and the quality of domestic football on offer in Thailand is improving rapidly.

Regulations allow teams in the top two tiers of the league to field up to five overseas players and, traditionally, the strength of the foreign contingent has gone a long way towards dictating a side's success. There is a plethora of African players attempting to forge a living in Thai football, and most clubs have at least a couple on the books, but home-grown

ENGLISH COACHES IN CHARGE OF THE THAI NATIONAL SIDE

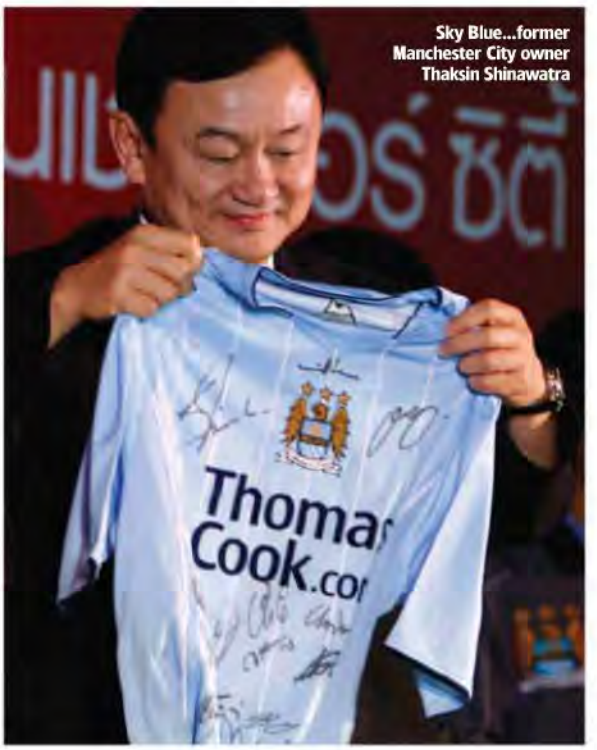
PETER WITHE
(1998 to 2002)
Centre-forward who won the European Cup with Aston Villa.

PETER REID
(2008 to 2009)
Everton and Manchester City midfielder who played in the 1986 World Cup.

STEVE DARBY
(caretaker 2009)
A one-time youth-team goalkeeper with Tranmere Rovers.

BRYAN ROBSON
(2009 to present)
Former captain of Manchester United and England.

Success stories...Muangthong United's Piyachart Tamaphan (far left) and Moussa Sylla (left) celebrate winning an AFC Cup match against Al Rayyan in Doha, while (below) ex-Everton junior Winothai sees his future at home



Sky Blue...former Manchester City owner Thaksin Shinawatra

Top Thai players are heading home while more European players and coaches are moving there

talent is starting to hold its own.

One reason for this is that top Thai players such as Teeratep Winothai, who spent time in England and Belgium, and Datsakorn Thonglao, who had a spell in Vietnam, are heading home, while outstanding players in the Thai Premier League are starting to attract the interest of European clubs.

Muangthong United are the reigning national champions and their success has seen an exodus of their first-team squad to Belgium. Ivorian midfielder Yaya Soumahoro averaged a goal every other game in Thai football before signing for Gent last Summer, while fellow countryman Mohamed Kone joined Mechelen earlier this year.

There has also been a steady increase in Europe-based players and coaches moving to Thailand. Zesh Rehman and Chris Brandon both arrived from Bradford City in the close season, with the former joining Muangthong United and the latter signing for BEC Tero, who are coached by former West Ham United midfielder Peter Butler.

Football in Thailand, however, still has its issues and idiosyncrasies – such as the mystery of the missing balls. When Nike recently provided enough T90 Tracer balls for every Premier League club to receive 25, the teams only ever received 23 each as someone, somewhere, helped themselves to a sizeable selection of expensive, top-of-the-range footballs.

On a slightly more sinister note, a probe is also currently under way into corruption claims surrounding the appointment of referees in the domestic Premier League last season.

Team names like Army United and Police United might not exactly be evocative, but the presence of both in the top flight gives an indication of how serious the forces are about their association with Thai football.

After Shinawatra set a precedent for populist political involvement with his purchase of Manchester City, a number of politicians now own football teams in Thailand. And an unusual situation has arisen in Buriram, a rural town with a population of just 28,000, which is home to two clubs: Buriram PEA in the Premier League and Buriram FC in Division One.

These two teams share much more in common than mere location as Buriram PEA is owned by powerful Thai politician Newin Chidchop, while his wife Karuna is chairwoman of Buriram FC. This might sound like a recipe for domestic disorder, but the two clubs actually exist in perfect harmony, with Buriram PEA lending players and, some believe, even a set of supporters to their neighbours.

As local rivalries go this must be one of the most benevolent in the entire footballing world. When Buriram PEA's supporters were named as the best in the Premier League it was Karuna who collected the award, wearing a Buriram FC shirt.

Unfortunately, not all fans in Thailand share a similar rapport and there was much soul searching last season when the spectre of hooliganism reared its ugly head for the first time.

Thai people may be renowned for their easy going attitude but unsavoury incidents at football matches are far from unheard of and erstwhile Division One club Nakhon Pathom are currently banned for two years because their followers set upon a referee after a disappointing draw in a play-off match. WS

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Andres Iniesta

In a country where football clubs and autonomous communities divide its people, Spain's World Cup Final hero has united a nation. **Profile by Sid Lowe**

He was the right man in the right place at the right time. The time was the 116th minute of the World Cup Final on July 11, 2010. The place was somewhere near the right-hand corner of the six-yard box at Soccer City in Johannesburg, South Africa. And the man was Andres Iniesta Lujan. Strip away club allegiances and the Spanish could not have chosen anyone better. Ask them who they would have picked to score that winning goal and, more often than not, "Iniesta" would have been the answer. Even from Madridistas.

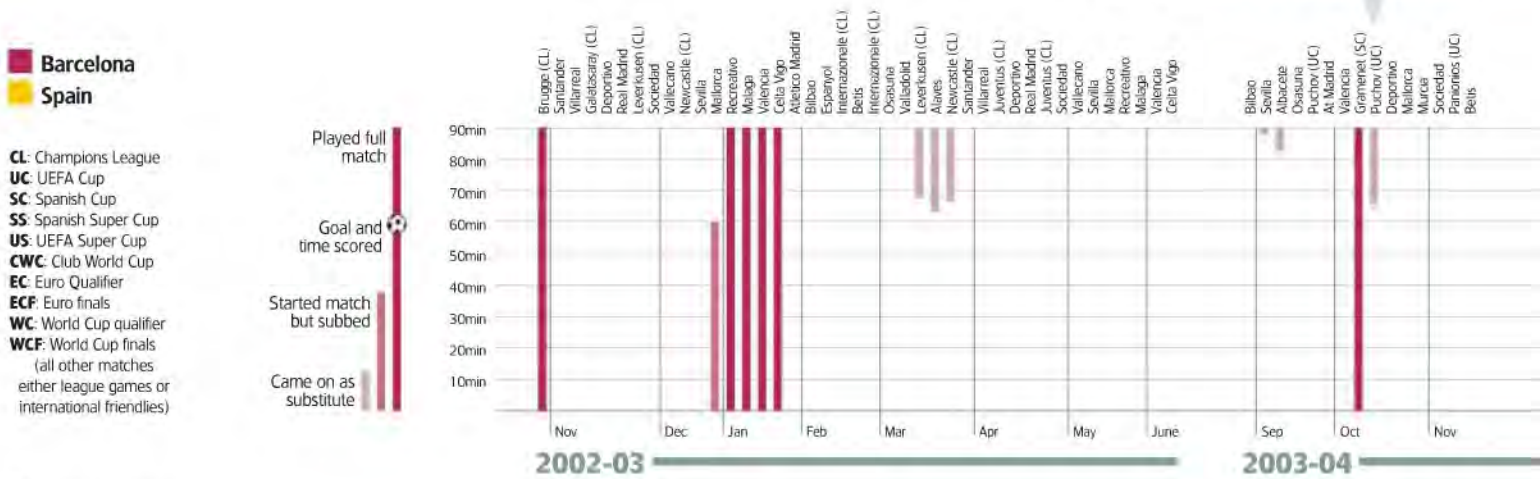
Easy to say now, of course, but Iniesta was simply the right answer. Looking back, the Spanish could not have been happier for the lad from Fuentealbilla to be at the heart of the greatest moment in the country's footballing history.

As the ball bounced, Iniesta knew. "When I got the pass I was thinking: 'I have to score.' I know where I am going to put it, more or less. The panorama was clear," he says, sitting on a canvas chair and wrapped in a manager's coat as the darkness sets in at Barcelona's Mini Estadi. "You know what's in front of you, your mind is clear. You're focused on where you are, where the goal is...and nothing else. I was still and I just waited."

Waited for what? Or rather, for whom. Iniesta told *El Pais*' Lu Martin that he was waiting for his friend Isaac Newton to appear. "Newton?" asked Martin. "Yes," replied Iniesta, laughing softly. "When ➤

TIMELINE: EVERY MATCH, EVERY MINUTE, EVERY GOAL

Oct 14, 2003 – appears from the bench to feature in a rare UEFA Cup outing for Barcelona and helps them to an 8-0 win against Puchov.

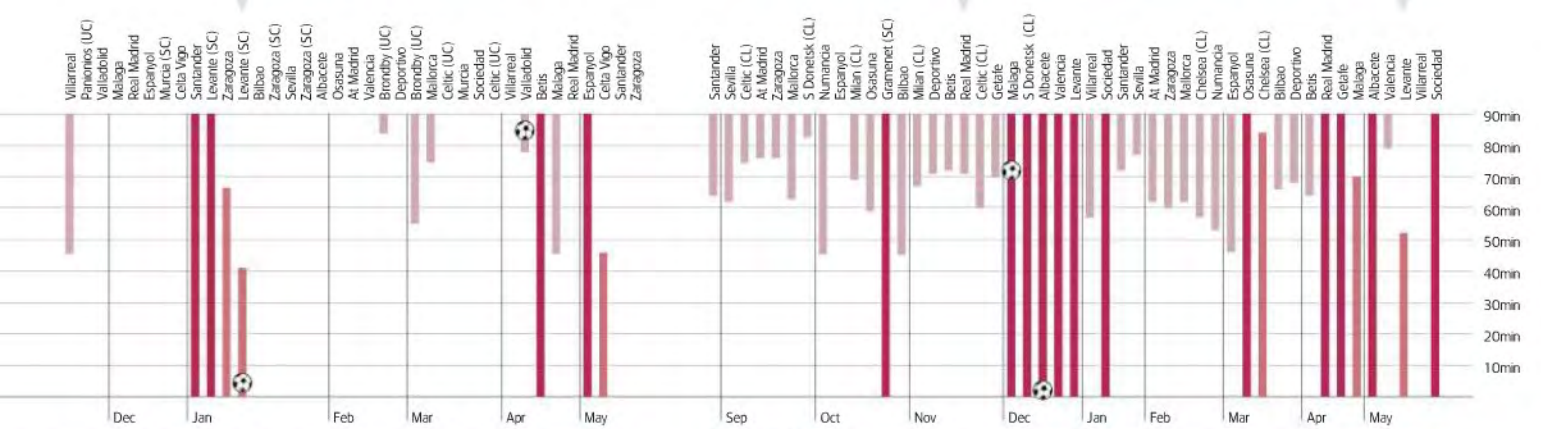


On top of the world...Iniesta in Johannesburg, July 11, 2010

Jan 14, 2004 – scores his first goal for Barcelona, against Levante, in a 3-1 second-leg Spanish Cup win.

Nov 20, 2004 – plays in his first *classico*, as Barcelona defeat Real Madrid 3-0.

May 14, 2005 – celebrates his first league title after a draw at Levante, Barcelona's first championship for six years.



2004-05

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FACT FILE

Andres Iniesta Lujan

Nationality
Spanish

Age
26 (11.05.84)

Place of birth
Fuentealbilla, Albacete, Spain

Height
1.70m (5ft 7in)

Position
Midfielder

Teams
Barcelona 2002-present

Honours
Spain: World Cup 2010; European Champ 2008.
Barcelona: Club World Cup 2009; Champions League 2006, 2009; Spanish league 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010; Spanish Cup 2009; Spanish Super Cup 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010.

I controlled it, I knew I was going to score. All I had to do was wait for the ball to drop to strike it. And why does it drop? Because of Newton's Law, because of gravity. This time, the apple was the ball and Newton's head was my foot."

Iniesta struck it cleanly into the net. And then he proved why he was the one they would have chosen. Not just because his finish was true, and not just because he did not miss, but because of what he did next. Running to the corner, Iniesta pulled off his Spain shirt. There was no posing, no arrogance, no redemptive anger. No look at me, just joy and humility. And a gesture. Not for himself, but for someone else.

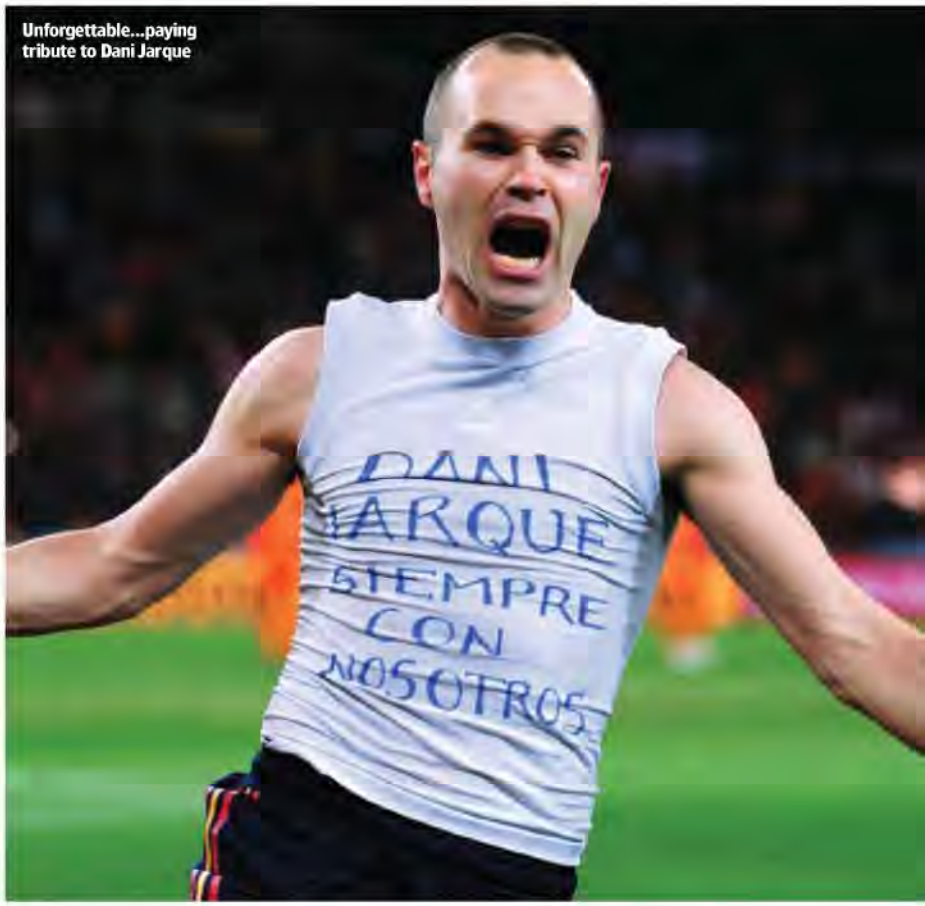
Underneath his shirt, he wore a vest that bore the slogan: "Dani Jarque, always with us." Jarque, who died of heart failure little under a year earlier, was the captain of Espanyol – Barcelona's city rivals.

The goal and the gesture just made Iniesta even more popular. It was a fitting tribute. It was also fitting somehow that he should have scored the most important goal in Spanish football history. And to think that he almost didn't make it at all. Injury had put his World Cup at risk and in the first couple of games, he seemed nervy, unsure. One columnist said he looked like he simply wouldn't shoot, so scared was he of breaking down. Fortunately, by the 116th minute of the Final, he would.

"I don't want to play the martyr," Iniesta says, "but it was very hard." He had been in tears; and few players' tears touch team-mates like Iniesta's could.

"That last injury was maybe even the hardest moment of my career," he says. "It was difficult to deal with, knowing that there was a World Cup and that time was ticking...I was lucky that it wasn't quite as long-term an injury as was first feared and I was able to get there.

"I was worried. I wanted to play at the World Cup so much. I was afraid of not being there. There were two months and a bit to go for the World Cup to start and the injury was an eight-week injury.



Unforgettable...paying tribute to Dani Jarque

"I had just one idea in my head: get ready and be there, arrive in South Africa in the best possible shape. I knew that I might not be in my best shape, but I had to get as fit as I could and be as ready as humanly possible.

"I spoke to the coach, Vicente Del Bosque. I spoke to Fernando Hierro, the sporting director at the federation, and I spoke to lots of other people there.

"They knew what stage I was at and their support was very important. They had faith in me making it."

As Iniesta recalls it, their message was simple: "We'll wait for you. Get ready, get back. We trust in you."

They were right to. As the tournament went on, Iniesta grew and grew. Jose Mourinho claimed that "any old left-back could have scored the winning goal", but it was not just about the goal. Looking back on the World Cup, when it came to the games that really, really mattered – Chile, Paraguay, Germany – he was superb. In the Final against Holland, and

Aug 13, 2005 – plays a cameo role as Barcelona beat Betis to win the season-opening Spanish Super Cup for first time in nine years.

May 27, 2006 – makes his international debut for Spain in a friendly at home to Russia.

Sep 12, 2006 – scores a seventh-minute goal as Barca begin their defence of the Champions League with a 5-0 win at home to Levski Sofia.

On and off duty...with Barcelona team-mate Lionel Messi, and in action for Spain

particularly in extra time when he took control of the game, he was extraordinary.

Then came the goal. His goal. Everyone's goal. This season, Iniesta has been handed a round of applause at every stadium in Spain. Not just because he scored the goal but because it is him. Whoever had got it would have been championed, but no other would have provoked such universal celebration, no one else would have been greeted with such genuine warmth. When Mourinho suggested that Iniesta did not deserve to the win the Ballon d'Or, the Spanish attacked him. Never mind that Mourinho had a point, he was having a go at Iniesta. Our Iniesta. How dare he.

> This season, Iniesta has been handed a round of applause at every stadium he has played at in Spain

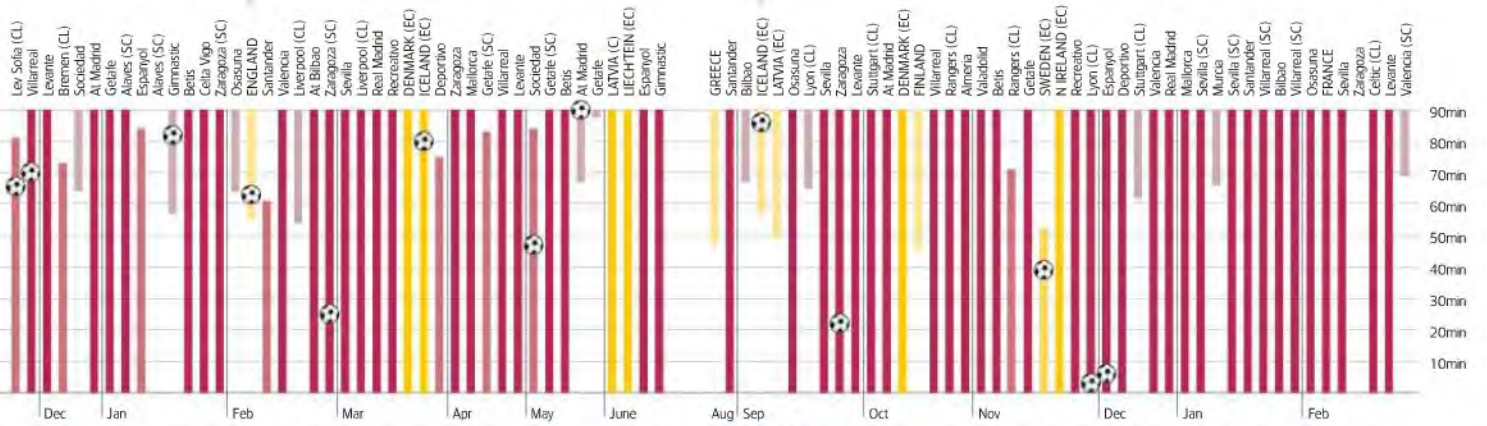
Iniesta is a national treasure, the player it is impossible not to like. When he failed to win the Ballon d'Or, the country was angry for him. Above all, though, they were sad for him. Spain loves Iniesta. Now more than ever, but before too. It doesn't matter if you support Barcelona or Madrid or Sevilla or Atletico or Espanyol, you like him. No one can remember him having a go at anyone. He is not flash, he is not arrogant and he is not provocative. He is the boy who, says one newspaper, "wouldn't break a plate". Instead, he is quiet, pale and apparently timid.

The appearance is slightly false, but spend any time with him and it is impossible not to like him.

A few years ago, his team-mate Xavi claimed that Iniesta was lacking just one ➤

Feb 7, 2007 – gets the only goal of the game as Spain beat England in a friendly at Old Trafford.

Sep 8, 2007 – hits a late equaliser to rescue a point away to Iceland in a European Championship qualifier.



2007-08

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Young talent...the 17-year-old Iniesta takes control for Barcelona's B side

thing: "media backing". Meanwhile, former Barcelona coach Lorenzo Serra Ferrer, complained that: "In our society a humble, discreet footballer doesn't sell like the player who speaks out.

"He has always been good; it surprises me that it has taken so long for people to really discover him."

As for current boss Pep Guardiola, he simply says: "Iniesta doesn't dye his hair, he doesn't wear earrings and he hasn't got any tattoos.

"Maybe that makes him unattractive to the media, but he is the best."

If that was a problem before, it is not any more. In fact, it is quite the opposite. What might have counted against him now counts for him.

Iniesta appears more accessible because he is so normal, even more of a hero for being unheroic. Get your head round the contradiction: humility has made him a star. Being underrated for so long made him even more highly rated – scoring the winner in the World Cup Final has elevated him beyond all others. There wasn't a better man to be lurking by the six-yard box at Soccer City.

"If anyone deserved to score that goal," says Guardiola, "it is Andres." He wasn't actually talking about the winning goal in the Final of the World Cup – he was talking about Iniesta's winner at Stamford Bridge in 2009 – but he might as well have been. Everyone would agree. Iniesta scoring brought the goal even closer to the fans. It humanised the success.

As one blogger put it: "I love you Andres: you've shown us that even the bald, the pale and the tiny can be the best." He is, says *El Mundo*, "Spain's *chico bueno*", a good kid. To use the cliche, he is "the boy next door". A pigmentation problem makes him pale, and his forehead looks large as his hair recedes. He is so pale that one satirical television programme portrays him with a face that shines bright white. He is depicted as a pyjama-wearing little lad always ready for bed. When he puts out the light, his room-mate Carles Puyol looks up shocked as his face lights up the room. "Shit, Andres," he exclaims, "You're a flipping glow-worm."

Iniesta is everyman doing what every man always wished he could do. And it does not seem to have affected him for the worse. Either on the pitch or off it. It's impossible to find a single person that has a bad thing to say about him.

Since the World Cup, Iniesta has got even better. His injury problems finally behind him – touch wood – he is performing better than ever before. It is as if the World Cup and his impending

parenthood has made him even more contented, but without blunting his ambition. He speaks of "tranquillity, and maturity" and has been playing in a more central position – more involved, more active – rather than as one of the front three. He is now Barcelona's No10, helping to run the game.

Last season Iniesta scored just once in 29 games – he missed nine through injury – in the league; this season he has already beaten his previous best La Liga haul of six goals in the 2006-07 season.

"He is," says Guardiola, "our signing of the season. Last year we did not have him in the key games and we missed him; he would have helped. You can really tell how much he has matured."

Additional hassles have not derailed him. When the paparazzi began following him after the World Cup he only confirmed the innocent, likeable impression people had. "I don't mind people following me," he said, deadpan. "But them laughing at my swimming trunks is a bit much."

When he tells you that "people's recognition is almost more important than any of the titles", you almost believe him.

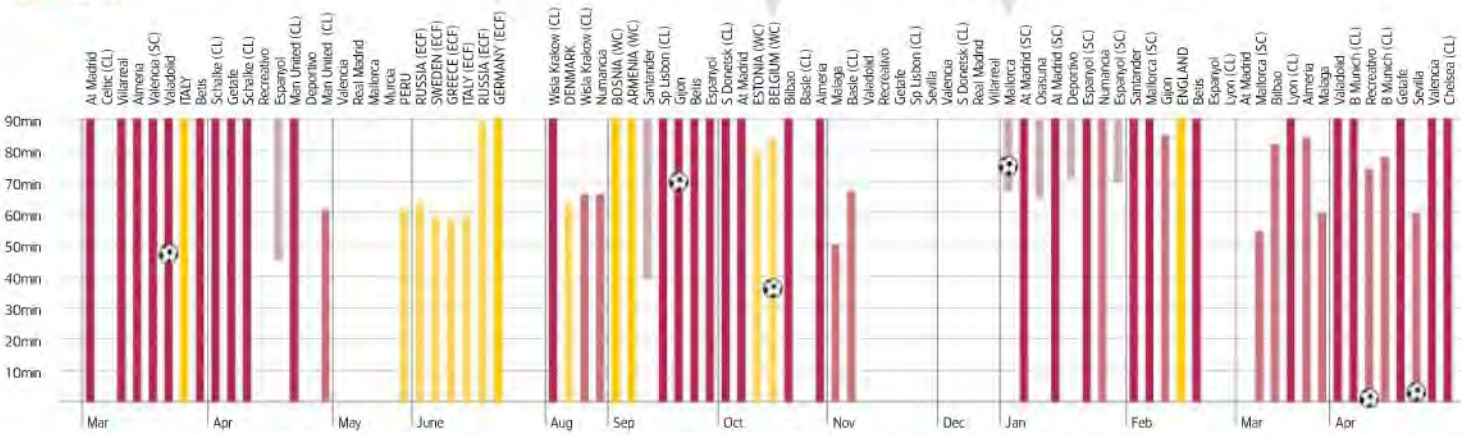
"I have always said that I feel very loved and respected by everyone. That's a genuinely special feeling; for people to show you that affection is perfect," he says. "It's important that people value what you do, what you are and what message you convey, your character as a person. I try to do my job, which is play football, but if people like me too then so much the better. That makes me feel proud. It is genuinely important.

"Beyond footballers, we are people. It matters. I care about that."

June 29, 2008 – plays in every game of Spain's European Championship success, culminating in the 1-0 win against Germany in the Final.

Oct 15, 2008 – scores away to Belgium as Spain make it four wins from four in World Cup qualification.

Jan 3, 2009 – after nearly two months out due to injury, scores after just eight minutes of his first game back at home to Mallorca.



2007-08 cont

2008-09

Academic start...Barca's training headquarters, La Masia

Andres Iniesta's father Jose Antonio still carries a picture of his son around in his wallet with him. In it, the youngster is wearing dungarees. A tiny kid, only interested in football in the tiny town of Fuentealbilla on the plains of La Mancha. It's Don Quijote country, *la Espana profunda*. Deep Spain.

> "It's important that people value what you do, what you are and what message you convey" Iniesta

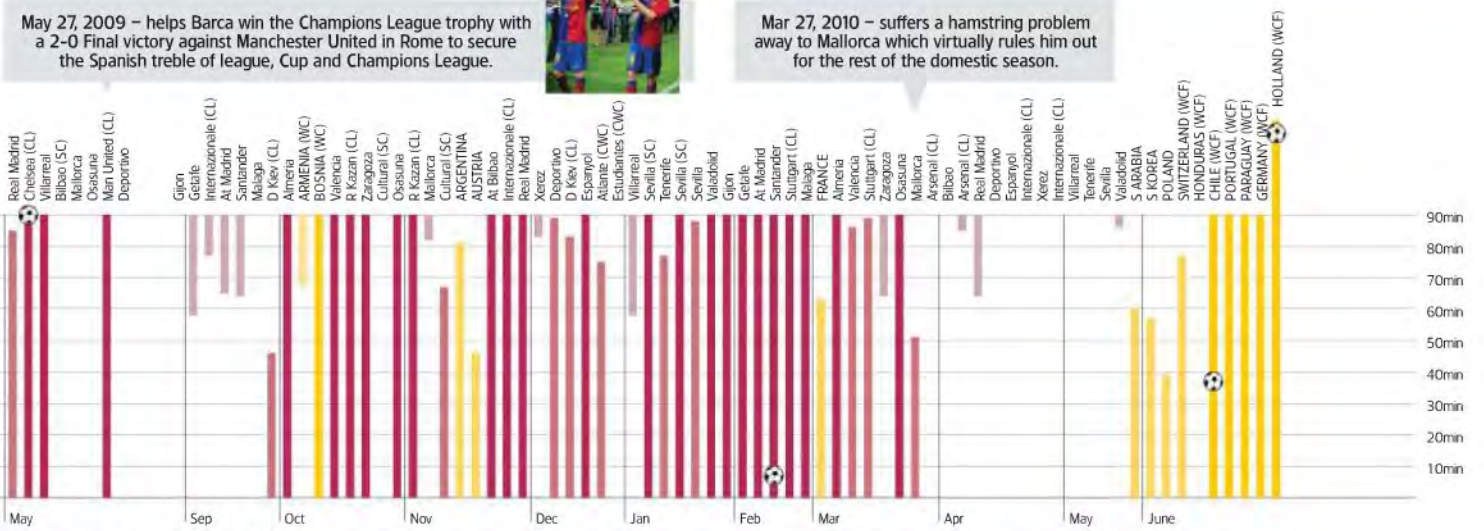
Andres' father was a bricklayer there, his mother a waitress. Its population is just 1,864 and the provincial capital is Albacete. Not the most salubrious of places, it is famous for the manufacturing of knives and not an awful lot else. "*Albacete, caga y vete*," as they say. "Albacete, take a dump and get out of there."

Iniesta did, of course. He first came to prominence during an annual seven-a-side competition for kids in Brunete, just to the west of Madrid. It was televised by Canal Plus but Barcelona had scouts there too and they could not help but notice him. Iniesta, playing for Albacete, was the tournament's best player. At the age of 12, he was travelling to Barcelona to join the Catalan club, staying at the now world famous farmhouse in the shadow of the Camp Nou: La Masia, the home of Barcelona's legendary artistic production line.

It was not easy. It says something about Iniesta that not only did he sleep in the same hotel bed as his parents when they came to visit him but also that he is prepared to admit as much. Journalists were asked not to ask him too much about home because he might burst into tears. But he grew stronger. Iniesta's meek exterior disguises an iron will and ➤

May 27, 2009 – helps Barca win the Champions League trophy with a 2-0 Final victory against Manchester United in Rome to secure the Spanish treble of league, Cup and Champions League.

Mar 27, 2010 – suffers a hamstring problem away to Mallorca which virtually rules him out for the rest of the domestic season.



2009-10

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Making the grade...on his first-team debut against Brugge in Belgium

real determination. He is tougher than people realise.

Above all, he was brilliant at football. He had natural talent. Guardiola describes him as "being a good footballer when he was in his mother's womb". But he learnt too. He talks admiringly of Barcelona's style, of the identity. The obsession with *rondos* (piggy-in-the-middle routines). The mantra "offer, receive, pass" is the foundation stone of Barcelona's success and of Spain's.

When Iniesta arrived at Barca, that identity was embodied in the first team by the club captain, Guardiola – the playmaker whose poster adorned Iniesta's wall at La Masia.

> Iniesta's meek exterior disguises an iron will and determination. He is tougher than people realise

"When I watch myself here," Iniesta says, gripping an iPad upon which there is footage of him as a kid, "I see the same player." And the movement is similar; the swiftness of the passing, the precision. Then there are the feet – smooth and incredibly fast. There's the shift of his bodyweight, barely perceivable yet decisive. The trademark moves: the fast switching of the ball from right foot to left and back again, the outside of the boot swing, full-circle away from the defender.

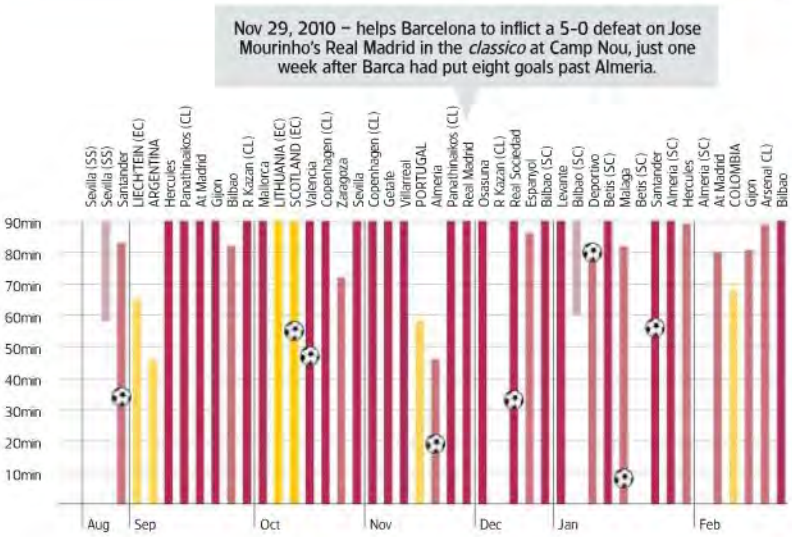
Asked to "walk" through the move in which he shifts the ball from one foot to the other for the *Inside the pro* series on the Nikefootball.com website, you get a brief, almost giddy feel for just how good he is. He is supposed to be walking it, breaking it down, illustrating it. Doing it slow. Iniesta approaches his opponent, talking as he does so and then, suddenly, it happens: right-left-right. Blink and you would miss it. His opposite number certainly does. Iniesta snakes past him.

He's doing it in slow motion and yet it is still almost implausibly fast. As he switches from foot to foot, so smooth, so speedy, so slick, there is actually a gasp from the handful of people watching. Among them is a member Barcelona's youth academy and sometimes swearing is the only thing that will do.

"Holy shit," says the youngster, his jaw hitting the floor. Iniesta seems unsure what the fuss is about. It is all so natural to him.

Little has changed. Iniesta's technique was always staggering. His touch, acceleration and vision, that ability to glide away from challenges with an almost imperceptible surge of acceleration. Small wonder Barcelona were enamoured with him. Guardiola, who was then Barcelona's captain and midfield lynchpin, recalls seeing Iniesta play as a youth and reporting back on a kid that "reads the game better than I do".

When Iniesta scored the winning goal for Barcelona in the Nike Cup at the age of 15, it was Guardiola that handed him the trophy. "In a few years' time," he told Iniesta, "I'll be watching you do the same from the stands." Soon, Iniesta's poster of



2010-2011

Guardiola was signed. The dedication read: "To the best player I have ever seen." Famously, the day that Iniesta joined Barcelona's first-team squad in training, Guardiola told Xavi: "You're going to retire me; [Iniesta] is going to retire us all." Luckily, he was wrong. Luckily, Barcelona would enjoy all three men together.

It was not just about Guardiola, either. And nor indeed was it just about Iniesta. It was about everyone else. Iniesta's game is associative, combinative. There is little ego about it – just one more reason why he is so well liked. He also challenges the cliches. Small and slight, the stats show that not only does he keep possession, he recovers it too. More than anyone else.

"Iniesta is the complete footballer," says Spain coach Del Bosque. "He can attack, he can defend, he knows how to construct and he's scoring more goals."

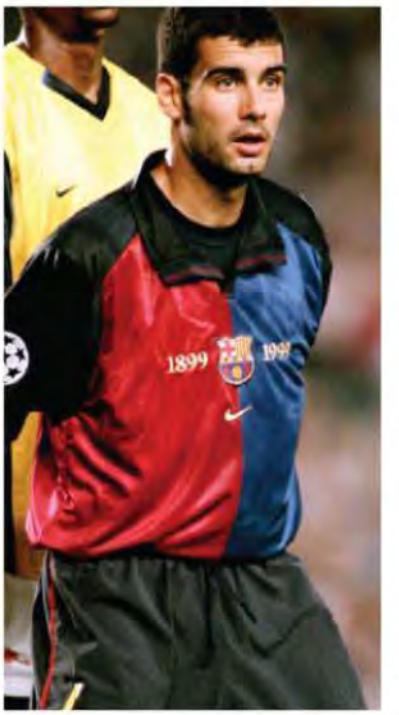
Juanma Lillo, the former Almeria coach and the man that Guardiola credits as having had the greatest influence on his career after they worked together at Dorados Sinaloa in Mexico, says: "Leo Messi produces the best plays but Iniesta is the best player in the world. Everything Iniesta does makes his team-mates better players." As Frank Rijkaard put it: "Iniesta hands out sweeties."

Now, more than ever. But this has been coming for a while. Before the 2009 Champions League Final – which Iniesta only just reached after struggling with a muscle injury and which he played in without being fully fit – Alex Ferguson noted his importance, saying: "Rather than their forwards, it is Barcelona's midfield you have to be careful with.

"Once Xavi and Iniesta get you on that carousel you never get off."

For many it was only injury that prevented him from proving it more often. Last summer, thankfully, he made it.

Two years ago, Wayne Rooney described Iniesta as the best player in the world. To their delight, this summer the Spanish could not have agreed more. Iniesta was the right man in the right place at the right time. Andres Iniesta was, simply, the right man. WS



Hero...Barca boss Guardiola in his playing days

Winner...striking the decisive goal against Holland in the World Cup Final

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To the power of three

Jonathan Wilson reflects on Liverpool and Napoli's use of a third centre-back to positive effect

No formation is ever dead; it merely disappears for a while as it evolves. Playing with three centre-backs, which had become almost as popular as 4-4-2 in the early 1990s, had all but disappeared across Europe, thwarted by lone-striker systems that effectively left one of the marking centre-backs redundant.

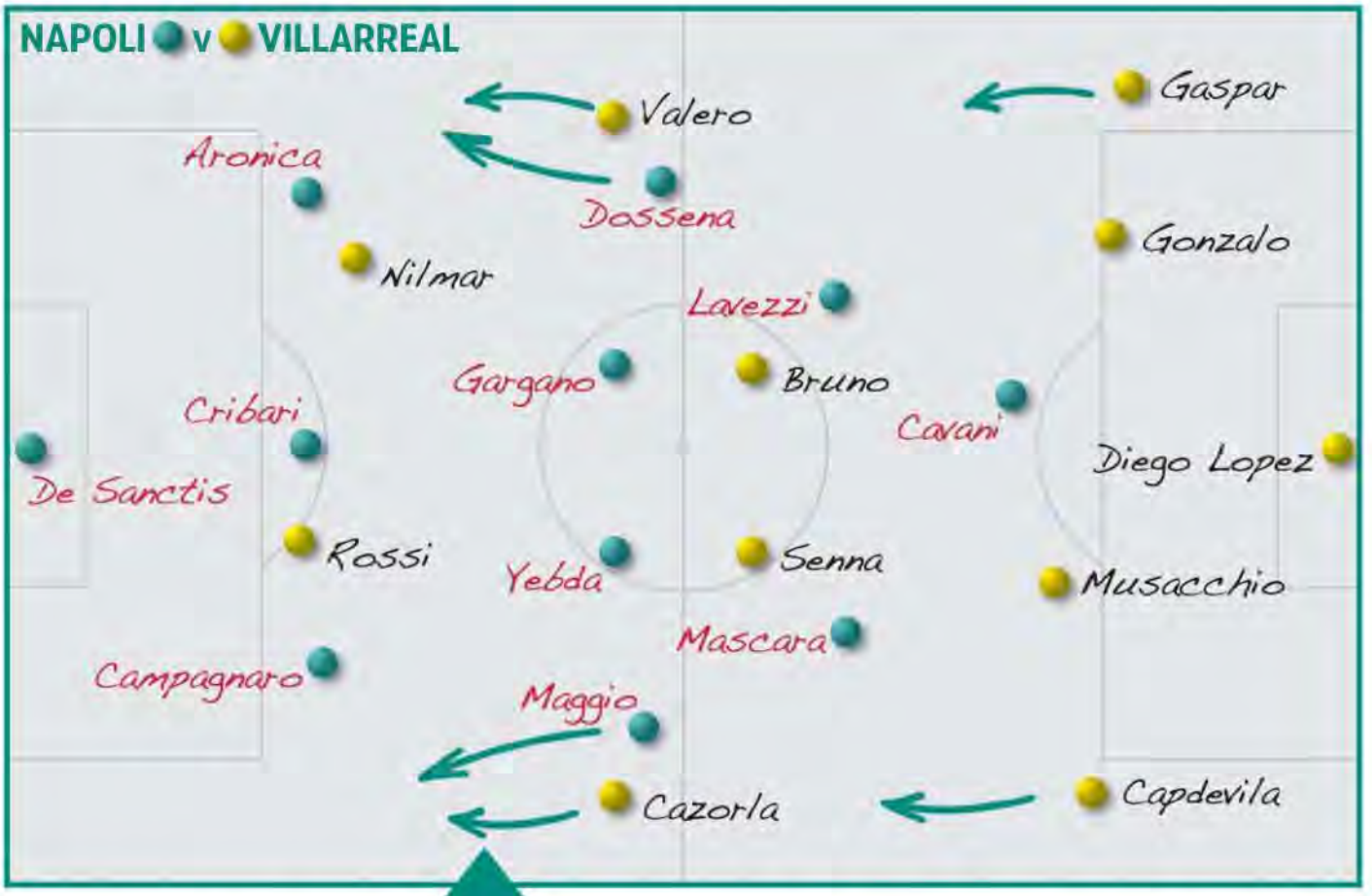
That 3-5-2 and its variants still had a role in the modern came became clear at the World Cup, at which numerous sides used it as a purely defensive system, happy to cede territory with that additional defender used as extra cover, a second libero. Estudiantes' use of the ploy in drawing 0-0 at Velez Sarsfield to ease them to the Argentinian clausura was discussed in this column in December. Over the past few weeks, though, 3-5-2 and its variants have begun to emerge in a less defensive context. It still seems to require a specific set of circumstances, and it's still far from the mainstream, but it has just begun to make its presence felt.

The most striking example came at Stamford Bridge as Liverpool beat Chelsea. Liverpool had played a 3-4-2-1 at home to Stoke City the previous Wednesday, something widely assumed to be a ploy to add more height to the team and so counter Stoke's direct approach. Liverpool were stodgy in that game – perhaps undone by the fact that Stoke played only one centre-forward and so had a man advantage in midfield – but did enough to win 2-0. Sunderland, intriguingly, adopted a similar approach at Stoke in their next match, and actually played with more fluency than Liverpool had (Stoke having reverted to two centre-forwards), only to be undone by their inability to defend set-pieces. It may be that adding a centre-back becomes a regular option for sides looking to combat Stoke's aerial strength.

Dalglish matched Chelsea's diamond in midfield, while Torres and Drogba were easily contained by Liverpool's three central defenders

Against Chelsea, Liverpool changed their midfield shape slightly, effectively using a diamond sat on a bed of 3-5-2, which raised the thought – although Kenny Dalglish dead-batted it – that his use of three centre-backs against Stoke had been at least in part designed to ready his side for playing the system at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea, meanwhile, in a bid to



accommodate both Didier Drogba and Fernando Torres, had switched to a 4-4-2 with a diamond. They had used it at Sunderland the previous Tuesday, with Salomon Kalou in the Torres role and Nicolas Anelka operating as the trequartista at the diamond's tip. It may have seemed an unnatural role for Anelka, but he excelled in it, revelling in the space Sunderland habitually leave at the back of midfield in the absence of the injured Lee Cattermole.

Against Liverpool, though, he found himself stifled by Lucas. Matching a diamond against a diamond meant that Steve Gerrard negated Frank Lampard, Maxi Rodriguez took on Michael Essien, and Raul Meireles ran Jon Obi Mikel ragged. Torres and Drogba, meanwhile, were easily contained by the three central defenders, who were able to operate in orthodox mode, with two marking and one holding space, occasionally advancing to support Lucas.

With no path through the middle, Chelsea were forced to look wide, but their problem in a diamond is that they have no natural attacking width – in fact, when Florent Malouda is as out of sorts as he has been of late, they struggle for attacking width even in a 4-3-3. What width they do have comes from their full-backs – in this case Jose Bosingwa and Ashley Cole. Both are naturally aggressive, but against Liverpool found themselves up against not full-backs but wing-backs. Whereas usually they would encounter a defensive presence deep in the opposition half, here they were meeting them around the halfway line, so were all but nullified as an attacking option.

Even here, the three at the back was essentially a defensive ploy. Liverpool would have been happy with a draw, but as it turned out, Chelsea's jitteriness gifted them two chances. Rodriguez slammed the first against the bar, Meireles put away the second, and Liverpool came away with a 1-0 victory that was probably deserved – if only for how comfortably they had contained Chelsea. Dalglish promptly switched back to a more familiar 4-2-3-1 for the home game against Wigan.

With a 3-4-2-1, Napoli have the best of both worlds, though front man Edinson Cavani can look isolated

It is still possible, in certain circumstances, for a system with three centre-backs to be used as something other than a defensive ploy, as Napoli have proved with their surprise challenge in Serie A. Their success seems largely rooted in the fact that Italian football has largely retreated into a tactical shell. Where pretty much every other footballing nation has embraced 4-2-3-1, if not wholeheartedly then at least to a degree, Italy persists with 4-3-1-2 systems that recall the broken teams of the late 1990s.

That isn't necessarily defensive and it isn't necessarily bad to watch, but it does lead to ponderousness and predictability that can leave Italian sides looking sluggish in Europe, as Milan discovered against Tottenham and Roma found against Shakhtar Donetsk. It also means there is often space to spare on the flanks in Italian games. If neither side has width, that doesn't matter too much, but if one side does, that is a huge advantage so long as it can win enough ball to work it wide.

By fielding a 3-4-2-1, Napoli have the best of both worlds: players on the flank to drive on to the opposition full-backs, plus three central defenders to deal with the opponent's two centre-forwards, and four midfielders in central areas to counter a 4-3-1-2's four central midfielders. Front man Edinson Cavani can look isolated, but he has been in such sensational form this season that it has hardly mattered. The system's limitations were shown in the Europa League against Villarreal, as the wing-backs, Christian Maggio and Andrea Dossena, were preoccupied with Villarreal's attacking wide midfielders Borja Valero and Santi Cazorla, precisely the sort of opponent they don't face in Italy. The result was a disappointing 0-0 draw in the home leg, followed by a 2-1 defeat in Spain.

In specific circumstances, though, which includes most Serie A games, playing three central defenders still makes sense. WS

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Facetoface

RAFAEL VAN DER VAART

"I have learned to love football again at Spurs"

Tottenham Hotspur's Dutch midfielder has been one of the stars of their debut Champions League campaign

It must have felt like a big step down leaving Real Madrid for Tottenham. Did you ever have any doubts about the move?
Joining any club after Real Madrid is a step down, but I preferred to look at the positives of the move to Tottenham. I was frustrated that I couldn't play at Madrid and lost some of my enthusiasm for the game, but this move ended those problems. I had to make a decision very quickly as the move came about on the final day of the transfer window. I made the right choice.

Were you disappointed that none of the major English clubs tried to sign you?
Not really. I always wanted to play in England and, even though there was some talk that Manchester United or Chelsea were interested in me in previous times, Tottenham were attractive to me as they were in the Champions League for the first time and a team on the up. Also, I wanted to join a team that could win trophies and my belief is Spurs can do this.

Despite playing for Ajax and Real Madrid, you have not won too many medals in your career. Is this your chief motivation now?
Winning trophies is a big target for me. You want to play on the biggest stages, in the biggest competitions and, at the end of your career, being a winner is the main target. I haven't won too much in my career and I want to put that right at Tottenham.

Half a season on, how do you assess the move to Spurs?
From the moment I walked through the door at the training ground I found a team that was more happy than any you could wish to see – and a manager who has a very special ability to mould a team together in Harry Redknapp.

Was Redknapp's desire to sign you one of the main reasons you joined?
I listened to the coach when the offer to join Spurs was accepted by Real Madrid and you could see he believed anything was possible for this team. That meant doing well in the Champions League and challenging for the Premier League title. Well, Harry has proved to be right because we are making a push in both competitions and the squad we have is capable of winning trophies so long as everyone believes it is possible.

When you arrived in England some of the media suggested Spurs had signed a player who would cause trouble in the dressing room. Was that unfair?
Maybe this reputation comes from the fact that I expressed my opinions to the coach in a certain way at other clubs. But this does not bring you the result you want. It got me nowhere arguing with people in my days at Ajax, and there was no point in trying to convince Jose Mourinho that I should be in his team at Real Madrid last summer. Moving clubs was the best solution for everyone.

Redknapp has reshaped his Tottenham side to hand you the free role you crave. Has that helped your game?
It has been nice to get a chance to play in the position I feel is best for me. I have a good relationship with Peter Crouch and the great thing about Spurs this season is everything is fresh. Winning at our biggest rivals Arsenal for the first time in years, being in the Champions League, believing we belong there...it is nice to be part of this.

Can Spurs win the Champions League?
We are not the favourites, but everything is possible – as our manager always reminds us. My first game in this competition for Spurs came against Werder Bremen and our first-half performance in Germany confirmed to me that this team could do well in the Champions League. Then the Inter Milan game at home was very special.

Do you see Spurs challenging the top sides in Europe for many years to come?
This Spurs team have players who can challenge anyone in the world, and when you look at guys like Gareth Bale and Luka Modric, they are world class. Jermain Defoe is one of the best strikers I have played with and Crouch is also a big threat for us. If everyone stays here and we build as a team, we can challenge for every trophy very soon. There is no reason to doubt ourselves.

How does the Premier League compare to playing in Spain?
England offers a bigger challenge in many ways. More teams are competitive in the Premier League; in Spain you just have Real Madrid and Barcelona, who win nearly every week. You notice a big difference in the competition in England because every match is a different challenge.

Does it annoy you when people constantly ask about your formative years living in a caravan?
Not really, I have no problem talking about it. A lot of people seem interested that I have gone from this lifestyle to something very different with my football career. I was happy with my life as a kid growing up, and being in a caravan with the rest of my community was not a problem. I'm lucky that I have been able to buy my parents a house now, but I'm not ashamed of my past.

Finally, do you see yourself staying at Spurs for a long time?
I'm very happy here and feel more relaxed at this club than any I have been at before. You could say that I have learned to love football all over again at Spurs and this shows how good this move has been for my career. I have moved around too much, so the time has come to settle in one place now.

Interview by Kevin Palmer

On Gareth Bale...

"You get the feeling the opposition are scared of him, scared of his pace. When you see what he did to Maicon, the best full-back in the game, over two games against Inter Milan, it is clear Bale is a special player. He will be good enough to play for the top sides in the world one day, but I hope he stays with Tottenham for now"

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Face to face

CHRISTIAN ERIKSEN

"If I leave Ajax it will be for a big club"

The teenager, who was Denmark's best player in February's friendly against England, is happy in Amsterdam but has ambitions to play in Spain

Why did you go to Ajax at the age of 16?
We thought a lot about the best move to make away from Denmark and when to do so. There were a lot of clubs to choose from at the time, but it was a big step for me and I thought Holland would be the best league; and that Ajax, with their reputation for helping young players, would be the right place. Their attitude to youth is well known in the game and many Danish footballers have been there in the past, like Frank Arnesen, Soren Lerby and Jan Molby. A big factor was that there would be much more chance of playing regular first-team football quite quickly than if I went to one of the bigger countries. It was very important and it seemed right. I love playing for Ajax and the atmosphere around the club is very good. Now that I live by myself as well, it's a very exciting time.

Former Ajax manager Martin Jol said you are a natural No10, a playmaker. Is that how you see yourself?
Yes, I love playing the No10 role. It is my favourite position. That's where I can play with Ajax. It's nice to have the freedom to move around the pitch trying to create things.

Many people have compared you to Denmark legend Michael Laudrup. How do you react to that?
I am too young to have seen him play, but I've watched a lot of videos and I have read his books. He was a big personality in the game, the biggest in Denmark, and of course it pleases me to be compared to him. Maybe it's not an easy comparison for me and it brings some pressures with it, but that's how football works and I am okay with that. I can see from the videos why people think we have a similar style. The funny thing is that I have never met him. We have just never been in the same place, but I'm sure it will happen soon.

You were the youngest player of any team at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. What was it like?
I think it was a valuable experience for me to be around so many good players. You dream about it as a young footballer and what struck me most was how big the whole event is. I saw so many people excited by it, with colour in their hair, and the supporters at home all wearing national red and white as they watched on TV. I would love to play one more World Cup with Denmark – well, at least one more. I hope it will be more because we have some good players in Denmark now.

What about your future, when so many big clubs in Europe are linked with buying you?
At the moment I'm not thinking too far ahead. I am very happy at Ajax, where I have a contract until 2014, and my aim at the moment is just to score a few more goals for the team. There has been criticism that I should score more and I think that's fair enough. In youth football I got many goals, but now I'm in the first team I'm not scoring. It's strange, but I know I'm playing well enough. I'm getting the chances, I'm just not taking them. It's just about confidence really.

Experience...up against Holland's Mark Van Bommel in last summer's World Cup

What about the speculation that Milan and Liverpool want you to join them?
I have read about Milan's interest, but there has been no contact with them. Liverpool is a new thing to me. It is fantastic to think that such big clubs have their eyes on me, but I don't worry about it. As I said, I am very glad to be with Ajax now, playing as a No10. It's hard to say what will happen in the future, but if I do leave Ajax it will be for a big club.

Which other clubs do you admire at the moment?
Well, Barcelona, of course. They have a wonderful style; the way they move the ball around is very nice to look at. Something is always happening in a game. It's never dull – and you can't say that about every team. It looks so easy when you watch them play, but of course the "easy" thing they do is the hardest to achieve. You know that as a player and it makes them special. My dream, I guess, would be to play in Spain one day. I think it would suit my style. But if I can improve my physical strength in the next year or two, which is my aim, then I could also play in the English Premier League.

What's the future for Denmark's national team?
We are confident we can qualify for Euro 2012. It is a tough group, but we came top of a tough group in reaching the World Cup. I think we can do it. We have a younger side overall and there is a good mood around the place. I still feel very new, but I'm getting used to it.

Interview by Jim Holden

"My aim at the moment is just to score a few more goals...there has been criticism that I should score more and I think that's fair enough"

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ClubFocus

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

New kings of the Bundesliga

Five years ago they brushed with bankruptcy. This season they have taken German football by storm. Nick Bidwell reports on the Dortmund revolution

As anyone connected with this season's runaway Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund will happily tell you, the best thing about their favourite sport is that it is played with a ball and not statistics.

With the second-youngest squad in the top flight (average age 24.4 years), Champions League big bucks conspicuous by their absence – none since 2003 – a wage bill a third of perennial German top-dogs Bayern Munich (£39milion to £117m) and the scars still fresh from their brush with bankruptcy five years ago, at the start of the campaign the Ruhr club seemed to be too raw and financially fragile to make the transition from Europa League candidates to masters of the Bundesliga universe.

Yet that is what has happened as the fresh-faced and vibrant Dortmund young guns have run rings around the opposition en route to opening up a 12-point lead at the top of the table with two-thirds of the programme completed.

Conducting a spin operation worthy of a major political party, Dortmund's players and coach, Jurgen Klopp, never tire of repeating the coy mantra that the dye is not cast, that they are definitely not champions elect. The trouble is, nobody believes them. While their rivals (namely Bayern, Werder Bremen, Schalke and Stuttgart) continue to make life difficult for themselves, BVB – Ballspiel Verein Borussia (ball games club Borussia) – have rarely missed a beat and will surely lift the 2010-11 *"Schale"*, the silver Bundesliga winners' shield.

"Being top of the league means you haven't done many things wrong, but it ➤

DORTMUND'S LEAGUE FINISHES 1964-2010

Oriental magic...Kagawa gets the plaudits after scoring against Sevilla

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Comfortable...keeper Weidenfeller keeps out Stuttgart in a Bundesliga clash

Passionate...Klopp makes his feelings known

does not necessarily follow that all is perfect," says Klopp, who recently extended his contract until 2014.

"What pleases me about my squad is that they focus on the negatives. They want to know how they can improve."

A season to savour for the 80,000-plus Dortmund loyalists, who once a fortnight create a din to raise the dead at the football temple that is the Westfalenstadion. Not only are they bathing in the satisfaction of seeing their favourites inexorably advancing towards their fourth Bundesliga crown (after 1995, 1996 and 2002), what has made this term extra special is the total domination exercised by the "*Schwarzgelben*" (black and yellows) and the benchmarks they have set in virtually every category: total wins (18 from their opening 24 games), away victories (11 out of 13), losses (two), goals for (52) and goals against (14). In a league of their own is the only way to describe them.

> "We're aggressive but it doesn't mean that no thought goes into our game"
> **Nuri Sahin**

On arriving from Mainz in 2008, Klopp promised "full-throttle football with passion" and nobody can argue that he has not delivered. Dortmund's tireless, high-pressing game is a model of the genre, they switch from defence to attack in the blink of an eye and with everyone seemingly turbo-charged – particularly attacking midfielders Kevin Grosskreutz and Japan international Shinji Kagawa – they often run the opposition off their feet. Straight for the jugular, they offer instant justice.

The popular image of today's Dortmund is that of the "Duracell Bunnies", the toy rabbits used by a battery manufacturer to promote their long-lasting wares. However there is much more to the "Yellow Peril" than a high-tempo game. In Turkey midfielder Nuri Sahin they have a passer of genuine class; the twists, turns and dribbling skills of teenage creator Mario Gotze add a

THE POWER CURVE

The key figures behind Dortmund

HANS-JOACHIM WATZKE

Former club treasurer and chief executive of a protective clothing company, he became Dortmund CEO in 2005, subsequently earning much praise for steering the club away from the insolvency rocks.

JURGEN KLOPP

Dortmund's head coach has been tipped as a future national coach of Germany. Recently agreed a contract extension until 2014.

DR REINHARD RAUBALL

In his fifth term as club president, the workaholic SPD politician and lawyer also heads the German football league.

THOMAS TRESS

Koln-based, former tax advisor and accountant brought on board in 2006 as finance director.

ZELJKO BUVAC

Forty-nine-year-old Bosnian assistant coach who has worked with Jurgen Klopp for over a decade.

MICHAEL ZORC

This one-club man starred in midfield for Borussia for 17 years before becoming director of sport.

OLIVER BARTLETT

Credit for having the fittest team in Germany goes to the London-born conditioning guru.

large dash of devilment; defensive midfielder Sven Bender and centre-backs Neven Subotic and Mats Hummels supply the athleticism and solidity; while to counter-balance all the bright young things, Klopp can count on the experience of 30-year-old keeper Roman Weidenfeller – arguably the best in the Bundesliga at the moment – and prolific Paraguay striker Lucas Barrios, who since joining them from Chileans Colo Colo in 2009 has proved worth his weight in gold.

CHESS MOVES

Nor are Borussia as tactically challenged as some people would have you believe. Although gung-ho is their default setting and it serves them well, they are far from one-dimensional. Appropriately for someone who during recent international tournaments has proved himself a highly intelligent and insightful TV analyst, Klopp has never been one to neglect match-day chess moves, and as the season has worn on his side has shown more and more cerebral qualities, learning how to be patient, retain better possession, to be flexible of formation and to batten down the hatches when they need to.

"Although our philosophy is for aggressive and fast-paced football, that doesn't mean no thought goes into it" says Sahin. "Our coach is a great tactician. For every game, he comes up with a detailed plan we have to make work."

When 43-year-old Klopp first signed on the dotted line for Dortmund there were some who thought that a guy with the look of a college professor would not fit in at this most blue collar of clubs.

But it would not take long for the Westfalenstadion masses to fall under his spell, to look beyond the rather bookish persona and discover a dyed-in-the-wool football man.

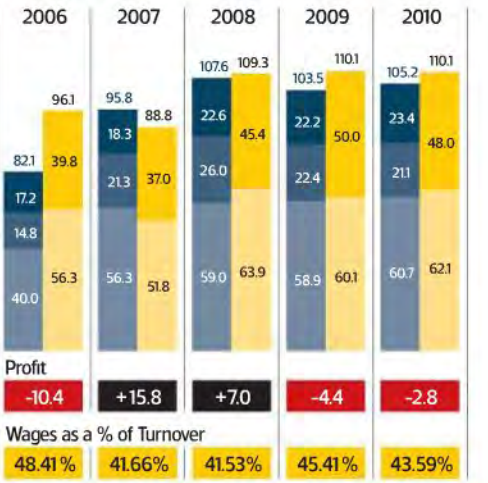
Klopp's insistence on total commitment, a "no cause is ever lost" spirit and team unity chimes perfectly with the core values of the fans here, as does his unbridled passion for the game. More animated on the touchline than a cartoon character, he celebrates every Dortmund goal with clenched fist à la Boris Becker and if feeling slighted by officialdom, he rants with the very best. "I have been known to behave like an idiot," he says with a smile. "I've had my fines. Sometimes when I see myself on TV, I'm shocked."

Little wonder Germany boss Joachim Low has suggested that Klopp be his ➤

PROFIT AND LOSS

TURNOVER: Match day, Media, Commercial
EXPENSES: Wages & salaries, Other

Figures in £millions



	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Profit	-10.4	+15.8	+7.0	-4.4	-2.8
Wages as a % of Turnover	48.41%	41.66%	41.53%	45.41%	43.59%

WEALTH CHECK: FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

Dortmund have turned around their finances remarkably over the last five years. Revenues are less than half of those of Bayern Munich, but with extra income from next season's Champions League, Dortmund should have no trouble adhering to UEFA's Financial Fairplay regulations.

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successor. In just two-and-a-half years in charge, Klopp has turned an empty vessel into the best team in the land and, cocking a snook at all those who believe bank balances are the be-all and end-all, has managed to cross the Rubicon without major transfer funds.

"Jurgen Klopp is the best possible coach for us," says club chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke. "He's a master communicator, a wonderful strategist, so enthusiastic and, above all, the players believe in him. There are no hidden sides to him. What you see is what you get. He has stamped his mark on the entire club, rekindled the ambition and raised standards.

"Before he came on board we'd suffered with instability in the coaching department [four bosses in as many years]. But now we have the ideal man to lead the team. You know, I regret not bringing him in sooner. We'd be even further down the road than we are now."

MOUNTAIN OF DEBTS

If, in the past few years, as the only German club to be quoted on the stock exchange, Dortmund have substituted their obsession with big-name signings for a reliance on youth, the reason is a simple one: the unavoidable need to reduce the £125m mountain of debt, which had them on the brink back in 2005.

Guilty of crass overspending on players, assuming they would always be in the Champions League and a reckless plan to fund the enlargement of the Westfalenstadion for the 2006 World Cup, the 1997 Champions League victors were within days of vacating the premises, only to have their skin saved by understanding creditors and bank managers, who agreed to deferred stadium rent and interest payments, and the new boardroom Holy Trinity of Watzke, president Dr Reinhard Rauball and finance director Thomas Tress.

The situation was parlous. But thanks to a drastic set of cost-cutting measures, a huge increase in commercial revenue and some imaginative debt restructuring, a solid economic foothold has been regained, so much so that £105m of the red numbers have been wiped off. Although they made small losses in each of the past two seasons (£4.4m in 2008-09 and £2.8m last term), generally they are in robust shape and Watzke has made it clear that the next step is balanced books.

"After going through really turbulent times, we are back on firm ground," he says. "We are healthy again and in a position which many clubs can only dream of. We have a fantastic group of young and ambitious players here and while they could perhaps earn more elsewhere, I'm confident they will look at the whole attractive package that is Borussia Dortmund and stay with us." WS

THE SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

20 Mitchell LANGERAK

Age 22 (22.08.88)
Young Australian recruited from Melbourne Victory last summer to understudy first-choice Weidenfeller. Capped at both youth and under-20 level, he only established himself in the Victory first team last season, edging out New Zealand international Glen Moss.

1 Roman WEIDENFELLER

Age 30 (06.08.80)
In the form of his life, he was recently linked with Aston Villa, but opted to extend his contract in Dortmund until 2014. A star of the 1997 Under-17 World Championship, he was signed from Kaiserslautern in the summer of 2002.

DEFENDERS

17 DEDE

Age 32 (18.04.78)
Accomplished Brazilian left-back who has made more than 300 appearances since joining from Atletico Mineiro in July 1998. Ruptured knee ligaments on the opening day of the 2008-09 campaign. May decide to leave at the end of the season.

15 Mats HUMMELS

Age 22 (16.12.88)
Bayern Munich may live to rue the day, in 2008, that they declared this polished young centre-back surplus to requirements, allowing him to go on loan to Dortmund, then telling him not to bother coming back. Composed, intelligent and can also play in midfield.

25 Patrick OWOMOYELA

Age 31 (05.11.79)
Began the season at right-back, only to lose his place when sidelined for four months with a serious Achilles injury. Fit again but, with contract talks stalling, is likely to move on in the summer. Son of a German mother and Nigerian father, he chose football over basketball.

MIDFIELDERS

22 Sven BENDER

Age 21 (27.04.89)
Hyperactive defensive midfielder who has taken advantage of the never-ending injury woes of Sebastian Kehl. From the Bavarian town of Rosenheim near the Austrian border, was inducted into the full Germany squad. His twin Lars plays for Bayer Leverkusen.

16 Jakub BLASZCZYKOWSKI

Age 25 (14.12.85)
The right-sided Poland international can be something of an enigma – at times unstoppable when pouring on the tricks and pace; at others, predictable and lacking in goalscoring nous. "Kuba" joined Dortmund from Wisla Krakow in 2007.

32 Antonio DA SILVA

Age 32 (13.06.78)
For all his left-footed playmaking ability and capacity to retain the ball, the Brazilian veteran was in danger of being unemployed when a loan spell at Basle ended last summer until Klopp, his former boss at Mainz, offered him a squad back-up role. Bundesliga champion with Stuttgart.

FORWARDS

18 Lucas BARRIOS

Age 26 (13.11.84)
Once considered solely a penalty box trigger man, the Argentina-born Paraguay international has become a much more rounded player since signing from Chilean side Colo Colo last season. Goals remain a priority but he has also discovered the value of closing down opponents.

7 Robert LEWANDOWSKI

Age 22 (21.08.88)
A useful sub, coming off the bench to score several times, but the top marksman in the Polish League in 2009-10 would have to admit that his £3.8million switch from Lech Poznan last summer has not worked out as well as he might have expected.

10 Mohamed ZIDAN

Age 29 (11.12.81)
After seven months out with torn knee ligaments, the Egypt star is operational again, but inevitably finds himself on the fringes. Former favourite of Klopp at Mainz, he has also played in the Bundesliga for Werder Bremen and Hamburg. Won the African Nations Cup twice.

"I have been known to behave like an idiot. Sometimes when I see myself on TV I'm shocked"

THE COACH

Jurgen KLOPP

Age 43 (16.06.67)
Thoroughly modern boss, once described by a French journalist as looking as though he had just walked off the set of cult US movie *Easy Rider*. Charismatic, genial, eloquent and frequently volcanic on the touchline, "Kloppo" combines will-to-win motivational powers and attention to detail. A long-serving utility player with Mainz, he went on to spend seven years as the club's head coach, notably masterminding their promotion to the Bundesliga in 2004. In his third season at the Dortmund controls.

26

Lukasz PISZCZEK

Age 25 (03.06.85)
Brought in on a free transfer from relegated Hertha Berlin last summer, this most versatile of Poles has extensive experience as a striker, winger and midfielder, but Jurgen Klopp prefers to use him at right-back with Owomoyela unavailable. Poland international.

27

Felipe SANTANA

Age 24 (17.03.86)
Towering Brazilian centre-back bought from Figueirense in 2008. Strong in the air and in the tackle, but has found himself squeezed out this term by the excellence of Hummels and Subotic. Says fighting for his place is easier than getting used to snow and ice in Germany.

29

Marcel SCHMELZER

Age 23 (22.01.88)
A conspicuous figure courtesy of his head-band, relentless overlapping and apparent immunity from fatigue, the chunky left-back made his full Germany debut last autumn. Joined Borussia from hometown club Magdeburg in 2005 and played his 50th Bundesliga game this season.

4

Neven SUBOTIC

Age 22 (10.12.88)
Highly-rated Serbia centre-back, born in Bosnia to Serb parents but spent his formative years in the south-west of Germany and Florida. Played for US Under-17s, but has nailed his colours to the Serb mast. Renowned for going on road trips in a battered camper van.

31

Mario GOTZE

Age 18 (03.06.92)
Son of a data technology professor at Dortmund's Technical University, he has taken the Bundesliga by storm with superb use of the ball and his goalscoring. On the club's books from age of nine, was player of the tournament in Germany's 2009 European Under-17 title win.

19

Kevin GROSSKREUTZ

Age 22 (19.07.88)
Arguably the most improved player in the country, the non-stop left-sided midfielder is more composed, with better ball retention and technical polish. Grew up as a Borussia supporter. Won his first senior Germany cap in a friendly against Malta last year.

23

Shinji KAGAWA

Age 21 (17.03.89)
Japanese attacking midfielder who was the revelation of the first half of the season after joining from Cerezo Osaka last June for a bargain-basement £300,000. Scored twice in the Ruhr derby win over Schalke but broke his right foot in January on Asian Cup duty.

5

Sebastian KEHL

Age 31 (13.02.80)
Talented holding midfielder who has been plagued by a succession of injuries and illness for the past four years – the latest being a hip problem. Competitive and a natural leader, he was in Germany's 2002 and 2006 World Cup squads. Joined from Freiburg in 2002.

8

Nuri SAHIN

Age 22 (05.09.88)
German-born Turkish international revealed last summer his aim was to be the best regulating midfielder in the world. Deeds have matched words this season, with his vision and anticipation at the core of the engine room. Made his debut in 2005, at 16 years and 335 days.

THE STADIUM

WESTFALENSTADION

With a standing and seating league capacity of 80,720 (reduced to an all-seated 65,718 for European games), Dortmund's home stadium is the largest in Germany, with the 24,454-capacity Sudtribune terrace the largest standing area in European football. Opened in 1974 for the World Cup finals, the ground has also hosted Germany home internationals and the 2001 UEFA Cup Final.

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Talentscout

South American Under-20 Special

LUCAS

COUNTRY	Brazil
CLUB	Sao Paulo
POSITION	Forward
AGE	18 (13.08.92)
HONOURS	2011 South American Under-20 Championship
LINKED WITH	Barcelona, Manchester United

With Neymar unlikely to be present at the World Youth Cup later this year, the pressure will be on Lucas to carry the Brazil attack.

That is the probable consequence of a magnificent hat-trick in the final game of the recent South American Under-20 championship in Peru as Brazil made sure of the title with a thumping 6-0 win over Uruguay.

With the Uruguayans needing only a draw to be champions, it was a tight game for 40 minutes – until Lucas struck twice in quick succession. For the first he ran on to receive a ball pulled back from the left, made space and hit a precise shot back across the keeper. The second was a superb solo effort, charging through from the halfway line and outpacing everyone to slip home from a narrow angle. And with 10 minutes to go he completed the rout with a vicious cross-shot.

It was the type of performance Lucas had been threatening throughout the competition. In all the previous games he had scored only once, despite setting up a multitude of chances for himself. Team play is not yet his speciality and at times he seems to play in a tunnel, with no peripheral vision. But with surprising strength, astonishing pace and dancing feet, he charged and slalomed his way through many a defence in Peru.

It was another resemblance, though, that marked the start of his career. Until a few months ago he was known as Marcelinho, the consequence of a perceived likeness with 1990s star Marcelinho Carioca. But as he made his name in the Sao Paulo first team it hardly seemed appropriate that the name belonged to an idol of local rivals Corinthians. So, in the middle of last year's Brazilian championship, he switched to Lucas, his real name being Lucas Rodrigues Moura da Silva.

He perhaps benefited from an unusually quiet year in the recent history of Sao Paulo. Sat in the middle of the table, they were not in serious contention for a Libertadores Cup place, still less the title, so the new boy took his first steps with the pressure off. However, the South American Under-20 Championship changed all that.

Whatever Lucas is called, from now on he will be called upon to reproduce the level of performance he displayed against Uruguay. If he keeps improving he could be a candidate for the wide-right role if senior coach Mano Menezes goes with a 4-2-3-1 formation in 2014.

The World Youth Cup will give him a chance to stake his claim.

Tim Vickery

He was known as Marcelinho but it hardly seemed appropriate as that name belonged to an idol of Sao Paulo's rivals, Corinthians

ESTEBAN ANDRADA

COUNTRY	Argentina
CLUB	Lanus
POSITION	Goalkeeper
AGE	20 (26.01.91)

A very strong contender to be the keeper of the tournament. Not perhaps the most flexible of stoppers, and occasionally unsure off his line, but was calm and safe throughout, with hardly a slip and plenty of important saves. His kicking was also good.

BRYAN CARRASCO

COUNTRY	Chile
CLUB	Audax Italiano
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	20 (31.01.91)

Right-sided midfielder who caught the eye with his pace, tight dribbling, and the power and precision of his right foot. Sent in excellent free-kicks, showed ability to cross on the run and scored three wonderful goals – the one against Argentina, when he cut in and hit a surprise left-foot shot, was a tournament highlight.

CASEMIRO

COUNTRY	Brazil
CLUB	Sao Paulo
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (23.02.92)

Tall, well-built central midfielder who had an excellent tournament. His passing perhaps lacks imagination, but he shone with his defensive covering and his powerful forward bursts. Scored three goals, all from headers, and also came close with a number of shots. A key man to watch in the World Youth Cup, but will he be able to impress against opponents physically stronger than the South Americans?

ALEJANDRO CHUMACERO

COUNTRY	Bolivia
CLUB	The Strongest
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (22.04.91)

Central dynamo who made his presence felt in defence and attack. Along with the lung power, he showed the vision to hit some fine passes and the quality to swing some good free-kicks into the opposition's box. Seems destined to become a key player for his country at senior level.

CHRISTIAN CUEVA

COUNTRY	Peru
CLUB	San Martin
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (23.11.91)

The best thing about the hosts' team. A busy little playmaker who was full of talent and attacking ideas, he is a wriggling dribbler who has the ability to bring his side's strikers into play by finding interesting angles for his little passes. Needs more composure in front of goal.

FERNANDO GAIBOR

COUNTRY	Ecuador
CLUB	Emelec
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (08.10.91)

Shielded the defence well and was especially impressive with the ball at his feet, bringing fluency to the game with a fine range of passing, and his long, diagonal strikes were the chief supply line for Ecuador's rapid wingers. Strikes the ball well and was unlucky not to get on the scoresheet.

LUIS FELIPE GALLEGOS

COUNTRY	Chile
CLUB	Universidad de Chile
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	19 (03.12.91)

Tall left-sided midfielder, lacking express pace but powerful, versatile and with an excellent left foot. Supplied some fine whippy crosses and also worked inside to good effect, combining well, getting into the area and scoring three times – two of them lashed in with power, the other after a well-timed run. ➤

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JUAN MANUEL ITURBE

COUNTRY	Cerro Porteno (Par)
CLUB	Argentina
POSITION	Forward
AGE	17 (04.06.93)
INTERNATIONAL DEBUT	For Paraguay in November 2009, v Chile
INTERNATIONAL CAPS	1 (0 goals) for Paraguay
FUTURE	Will join Porto this summer

Argentina unleashed their secret weapon at the South American Under-20 Championship in Peru: the "Paraguayan Messi".

Iturbe is Paraguayan in all but birthplace, his parents, like many of their compatriots, having moved to Buenos Aires in search of work. It was here that their son was born, but they soon moved back home and Juan Manuel grew up in Asuncion, where he came up through the youth ranks of local powerhouse Cerro Porteno.

His potential was soon apparent and Paraguay – who have selected a number of Argentina-born players in recent years – tried to ensure that Iturbe would be theirs by giving him a senior cap at the age of 16, bringing him on as a substitute against Chile in November 2009.

But because it was only a friendly nothing was binding and Argentina swooped. He was taken to the World Cup as part of the sparring team for Diego Maradona's men and then fast tracked into their team for the Under-20 Championship, where the reason for all the fuss became immediately apparent.

Like Messi in 2005, Iturbe carved his stocky left-footed way through defences, but the comparison is unfair and Iturbe was quick to play it down. The ball is not tied to Iturbe's foot in quite the same way that Messi manages, but there is enough there to raise hopes of a top-class player. Two years younger than most of his team-mates, the 17-year-old Iturbe provided most of the moments of quality in a disappointing team, even though he came off the bench in five of the nine games.

His three goals included the winner against Brazil, cutting through the defence to the left and slotting home. In the previous game against Chile he managed the mirror image, slipping past the keeper with his "wrong" foot – a goal that won him fewer headlines but did more to underline the versatility of his talent.

Porto will soon be the beneficiary of his services, but until he turns 18 Iturbe will continue to play for Cerro Porteno – for whom he stole the show in their opening Libertadores Cup game this year, scoring twice in the 5-2 win over Colo Colo.

He has, though, ruled out the prospect of playing for Paraguay again. "It would be a step backwards," he says, determined to use that burning acceleration to go in the other direction.

Tim Vickery

Iturbe was fast tracked into Argentina's Under-20 Championship team, where the reason for all the fuss became apparent

ADRIAN LUNA

COUNTRY	Uruguay
CLUB	Defensor
POSITION	Forward
AGE	18 (21.04.92)

Little support striker who liked to float infield from the left flank to combine with the centre-forward. A key man from set-pieces, he was the side's top scorer with three goals, all from superbly struck free-kicks. A better left foot would make him a more potent force from open play.

YOHANDRY OROZCO

COUNTRY	Venezuela
CLUB	Wolfsburg (Ger)
POSITION	Forward
AGE	19 (19.03.91)

Some players went to the South American Under-20 Championship as rookies, others, such as the Venezuela captain, were already seasoned professionals.

The baby of his country's squad at the 2009 World Youth Cup, the left-footed support striker was fast tracked into the senior squad and has already accumulated nine caps.

Among the leading scorers in the Venezuelan championship last year with Maracaibo club Zulia, Orozco was expected to come up with something special in Peru – and he did not disappoint. Beautifully balanced and behind most of the good things that his side produced, his speciality is the sharp turn. He runs with the ball at pace, retaining the vision and technique to slip dangerous passes behind the defensive line.

Venezuela scored four times in Peru; two he set up, the other two he scored. His solo strike against Peru was magnificent, turning on the halfway line, swerving past a few opponents and smacking home an unstoppable shot. And against Argentina he showed quick thinking to score with a looping header. Such exploits attracted attention from the army of scouts on duty in Peru and once Venezuela were eliminated he was snapped up by Wolfsburg.

DIEGO POLENTA

COUNTRY	Uruguay
CLUB	Genoa (Ita)
POSITION	Defender
AGE	19 (06.02.92)

Captained the Under-17s in 2009 from centre-back and did the same for the Under-20s from left-back, wing-back and even midfield. Well-built, he rumbles forward with strength and quality, scored a superb solo goal against Chile and supplied some beautiful left-footed crosses. Lack of real pace, though, means that his top-class future will probably be as a defender, where he is hard, solid and constructive.

DENNYS QUINONEZ

COUNTRY	Ecuador
CLUB	Barcelona
POSITION	Defender
AGE	19 (12.03.92)

Formed an excellent partnership with the taller, more aggressive John Narvaez, providing cover, reading the game well, showing fine anticipation and timing in the tackle. A centre-half so quietly efficient that it takes time to realise how good he is. Not the greatest in the air, perhaps, but his quality helps explain why Ecuador conceded just five goals in nine games.

IVAN TORRES

COUNTRY	Paraguay
CLUB	Cerro Porteno
POSITION	Midfielder
AGE	20 (27.02.91)

Promising left-footed attacking midfielder who was happy to operate either wide on the left or more centrally, catching the eye with cool, first-time passes and with probing long balls. Scored a spectacular long-range effort against Bolivia, but did struggle against physically stronger teams.

Tim Vickery

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Eastern ambition

The 2018 World Cup will see billions invested in an unprecedented stadium-building programme, but local clubs are going under. **Victor Gusev reports**

Russia is set to become a giant building site over the next seven years as the country prepares to host the 2018 World Cup. Almost £2.5billion will be spent on 15 new stadiums and the reconstruction of one existing arena, while the estimated bill for total infrastructure costs is expected to top £30bn.

New airports, roads, hotels and training centres will be needed in 13 cities, including smaller and internationally unknown locations such as Saransk. Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin, who flew to Zurich as soon as Russia's selection to host the 2018 World Cup was confirmed, has promised that the tournament "will be organised at the highest level".

But while money is unlikely to be a problem during Russia's preparations for 2018, serious financial difficulties are changing the face of the country's Premier League.

In January, Saturn, a club based in the Moscow suburb of Ramenskoye, withdrew from the Premier League and were dissolved after a repeat of the circumstances that engulfed FC Moscow in 2010. Both clubs were confronted with insurmountable cash shortages after their owners decided to cut the clubs' finances.

And Amkar Perm, another club facing similar pressures, were asked by league officials to produce additional budget guarantees before the start of the 2011-2012 championship.

Just like FC Moscow, Saturn have been replaced in the Premier League by a First Division club. The top two ➤

Champions...Zenit's Vladimir Bystrov with the league championship trophy

Foot soldiers...security men stand guard as Zenit fans cheer their team on to victory over Rostov

BRIEFING

LEAGUE FORMAT

The 16 teams in the 2011-12 Premier League will play each other twice before splitting into two groups. The top eight will then contest the title and European places, while the bottom eight battle against relegation. The following season will run from autumn of 2012 to spring 2013, rather than following the calendar year as it did until this term's transitional campaign.

Russia has three places in the Champions League: two qualifying automatically for the group stage and one entering in the third qualifying round. Fourth and fifth in the league join the Russian Cup winners in the Europa League.

Euro hopes... Spartak Moscow's Alex

MEDIA

The daily newspapers *Sport-Express* (below) and *Sovietskiy Sport* cover Russian football extensively, with match reports, interviews and analysis. The most popular specialist football weekly is *Football*, which dates back to 1960. Monthly football magazines have a tendency of appearing and disappearing. They focus mostly on international soccer and foreign stars.

TELEVISION

Russian league games can be seen in full on the NTV+ pay channel, while the top match from each weekend is usually broadcast by a free federal nationwide channel.

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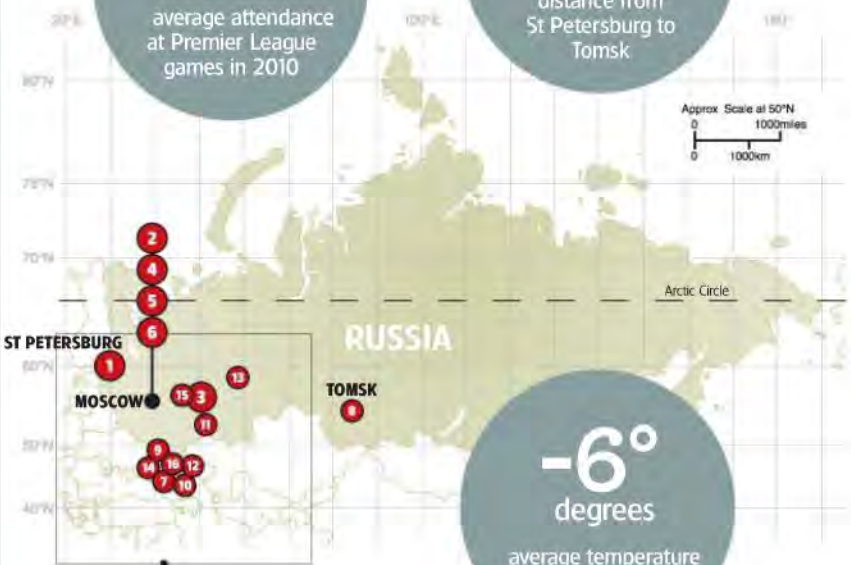
THE CLUBS A GUIDE TO THE TOP TEAMS

12,237 people
average attendance at Premier League games in 2010

1,946 miles
distance from St Petersburg to Tomsk



-6° degrees
average temperature in Moscow in March

WORLD CUP STADIA LOCATIONS

THE BIG SIX...

1 ZENIT ST PETERSBURG
Russia's richest club with UEFA Cup and European Super Cup victories, they have aspirations of success in the Champions League. Backed by the Gazprom energy company.

2 CSKA MOSCOW
Known as "the army club" due to links to the ministry of defence, they will share the Luzhniki Stadium with Spartak Moscow this season and later move into one of the World Cup stadiums.

3 RUBIN KAZAN
Receive good support from the Muslim republic of Tatarstan and have won two national titles in the last three seasons. Due to move into a new stadium next year.

4 SPARTAK MOSCOW
The "people's club" are desperately trying to regain their status of the 1990s, when they won the Russian title nine times. Sharing with CSKA this term, they will also move into a new World Cup arena.

5 LOKOMOTIV MOSCOW
A true force at the turn of the century, they hope to rejoin the title race with strong financial support from the Russian railway industry and the skills of former Spartak Nalchik coach Yuri Krasnozhan.

6 DYNAMO MOSCOW
Poor management almost brought the club to its knees in recent years, but the historic potential means they cannot be discounted. Playing at Arena Khimki while the new Dynamo Stadium is under reconstruction.

second-tier clubs, Kuban and Volga, had already won promotion, so third-placed KAMAZ and then fourth-placed Nizhny Novgorod were invited to take Saturn's place. However, both said no, arguing that they did not have the financial resources to join the top echelon, especially at such short notice.

So that's how fifth-placed Krasnodar got their chance this season, joining city rivals Kuban in the Premier League, but some experts, including Russian sports minister Vitaliy Mutko, are sceptical that two teams from one city outside Moscow can survive in the elite division. "It is too heavy a burden for such a city," says Mutko. "Krasnodar is not London."

While some clubs have relinquished their Premier League membership, others have turned to the government for help. Samara's Krylia Sovetov were pulled back from the brink of financial ruin in 2010 when Putin called on local businessmen to "save football in the region from extinction".

Prime minister Vladimir Putin has promised that the 2018 World Cup will be organised "at the highest level"

The latest team to appeal for financial aid are Tom from the Siberian city of Tomsk. Even if they are successful, their annual budget will be nowhere near Zenit's estimated £62millon or even the £46m announced by CSKA and Spartak.

There will be no national champion this year as the Premier League undergoes a transitional season (see *Briefing*, page 71) that will allow Russian football to synchronise with the majority of Europe.

However, there have been calls for investment in pitches to help smaller ➤

Zenit's home...Petrovsky Stadium

Army base...Luzhniki Stadium

New stadium...ready in 2012

Sharing...Luzhniki Stadium

On track...Lokomotiv Stadium

Being built...proposed design

...AND THE REST

SPARTAK NALCHIK

7 Have managed to stay afloat and even impress despite poor financing over their five years in the Premier League. Came sixth in 2010, their best finish.

TOM TOMSK

8 Siberia's strongest team rely largely on the coaching talent of Valeri Nepomniachi, who enjoyed success with Cameroon at the 1990 World Cup when they became the first African side to reach the quarter-finals.

Battling...Tom's Artem Dzyuba (in white)

ROSTOV

9 Strong middle-ranking club with traditions dating back to Soviet times, when known as Rostelmash. New stadium will be a 2018 World Cup venue.

TEREK GROZNY

10 Lavishly supported by the local government of Chechnya, – president Ramzan Kadyrov is the club's owner – and now coached by Ruud Gullit.

KRYLIA SOVETOV

11 Well supported, but have had to rely on sporadic cash injections from local businessmen. Based in the city of Samara, where a new stadium is proposed for the 2018 World Cup.

ANZHI MAKHACHKALA

12 Club from Dagestan in the North Caucasus who rely on local players and the leadership of charismatic coach Gadzhi Gadzhiev. Have signed Brazil left-back Roberto Carlos.

AMKAR PERM

13 Relegation battlers who almost withdrew from the league due to financial difficulties. The easternmost club to have played in Europe.

KUBAN KRASNADOR

14 Solid newcomers, winners of Russia's second tier last season, who have reasonable ambition under Romanian coach Dan Petrescu.

Head first...Krylia's Oleg Ivanov (in white)

VOLGA NIZHNI NOVGOROD

15 Promoted to the top tier after finishing as First Division runners-up last season. The busiest club in the pre-season transfer market.

FC KRASNODAR

16 Jumped on the Premier League bandwagon following the withdrawal of Saturn, despite only finishing fifth in last season's second tier.

Hot and cold...Russian football is a game for all seasons but that doesn't stop Zenit fans, right, stripping off

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clubs cope with the country's severe climatic conditions. When Nikolai Tolstykh – head of the Professional Football League (PFL), which represents the small-budget clubs of the lower divisions – voted against the change, the Russian Football Union (RFU) withdrew the championship licence from the PFL and handed it over to a newly created body.

Meanwhile, the Premier League is sticking with its limit of six foreign players on the pitch at any given time, despite criticism from coaches – including Spartak Moscow's Valery Karpin, who wants even more to be allowed, arguing young Russian footballers who are currently guaranteed a place on the roster would have to work harder to progress. In 2010 the Premier League featured 174 foreigners, compared with 271 local players.

Unacceptable... black players in Russia are still subject to racist taunts

The presence of a large number of black players is now widespread in Russian football, but the racist behaviour of some fans has changed little. In one of the most notorious instances, Lokomotiv fans celebrated the transfer of Nigerian striker Peter Odemwingie to West Bromwich Albion by displaying a banner with the slogan "Thanks West Brom" and

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

THE OWNERS

ALEXEI MILLER
Head of Russia's biggest corporation Gazprom, owners of Zenit, he is the man behind their multimillion investment in the club.

ROMAN ABRAMOVICH
Multibillionaire owner of Chelsea. Head of the national academy of football, he finances a number of nationwide football programmes.

YEVGENIY GINER
CSKA President since 2001, he is a successful businessman who has been the driving force behind the team's success in recent years.

LEONID FEDUN
Owner and president of Spartak Moscow, he is also vice-president of Lukoil, Russia's largest oil company.

THE CAPTAIN

ANDREI ARSHAVIN
Arsenal midfielder and national skipper who represented the country's players in the World Cup bid delegation in Zurich.

THE MANAGER

DICK ADVOCAAT
The Dutchman returned to Russia as the national coach in 2010, after a successful spell with Zenit from 2006 to 2009.

SERGEI FURSENKO
Key figure at Gazprom and a former Zenit president who took over as Russian Football Union president in February 2010.

VITALI MUTKO
Sports minister and a key figure in the World Cup bid whose "Let me speak from my heart..." speech at the presentation provoked praise and bitter jokes in equal measure.

VYACHESLAV KOLOSKOV
Now honorary president of the Russian Football Union, his links at FIFA and UEFA played an important role in Russia's selection to host the 2018 World Cup.

ALEXEI SOROKIN
Young, multi-lingual and talented 2018 bid leader who is sure to play an important role in Russia's World Cup organising committee.

THE POLITICIANS

a picture of a banana. The football authorities, who have always stopped short of effective measures to tackle racism, are now considering strict measures, including deducting points.

On a more positive note, four Russian clubs made it through to the last 32 of the Europa League, allowing some to predict an all-Russian Final in Dublin.

At international level, the Under-17 team's European Championship victory in 2006 has been the only success in recent years, although the full national side – which failed to make it to the 2010 World Cup finals under Guus Hiddink – are currently top of their Euro 2012 qualifying group.

Dick Advocaat, who replaced his fellow Dutchman as national coach, fully understands that not getting to Ukraine/Poland would be a major setback, especially as the tournament is being held so close to home, and he has adopted a low-risk strategy, making almost no changes to the squad he inherited from Hiddink and preferring instead to stick with tried and tested players.

Russia's expectations are such that, even before the country had won the right to host the 2018 World Cup, Sergei Fursenko, president of the RFU, made the bold prediction in his inaugural speech in February 2010, that the national team would win the tournament.

But many others, including Vyacheslav Koloskov, who had been at the helm of Russian football for almost three decades, see no such reason for optimism, claiming: "Winning the World Cup at home is a dream. But for 2018 it is a dream that will never come true. I just do not see reasons for it." WS

Target Ukraine/Poland...Roman Shirokov (second right) gets the plaudits after scoring in Russia's Euro 2012 qualifier against the Republic of Ireland in Dublin

WEEKEND AWAYDAYS

MOSCOW

WHEN April 30 - May 1, 2011 **WHY** Three local teams in action in one weekend

CSKA V SPARTAK MOSCOW April 30, 2011
LOKOMOTIV V KUBAN May 1, 2011

With four clubs in Russia's Premier League, Moscow provides enough curiosity and derby days to satisfy most football visitors. The choice upcoming fixture is CSKA v Spartak Moscow, scheduled for Saturday, April 30 at the prestigious Luzhniki national stadium which they share, while Lokomotiv – currently the only Moscow club to have their own ground – are set to host Kuban the following day at their 30,000-capacity stadium.

Cross-town rivalries offer a historic dimension to an afternoon's football and the Russian capital is no different. When Moscow's traditional clubs were formed in the 1920s at the onset of the Soviet era, Dynamo were connected with the ministry of the interior and tied to the KGB, CSKA represented the army, and Lokomotiv the railway workers. As a result, Dynamo supporters are called *musora* (caps) and CSKA followers are *koni* (horses).

Spartak, meanwhile, with their affiliations to the local food producers' co-operative, were always defiantly independent, hence their popular status after the fall of Communism.

In Soviet times, the big game was Spartak versus Dynamo, but today's main rivalry is between Spartak and CSKA. Although fairly recent, the rebellious nature of the Spartak support, added to CSKA's growing right-wing following meant games occasionally spilled over into ever-worsening hooliganism, and these days derby games are heavily policed, particularly as the pair share currently the same stadium.

Heated affair... the Spartak v CSKA derby

As for Lokomotiv, their fans are hardly blameless where racial abuse is concerned, as evidenced by their "banana banner" when Nigeria striker Peter Odemwingie left the club for West Bromwich Albion. Their age-old rivalry with Torpedo, who are now in the First Division, remains.

Overshadowed of late by the three other Moscow clubs, the once-mighty Dynamo currently play their home games in Khimki, a suburban town out towards Sheremetyevo Airport, while they wait for the rebuilding of their own Dynamo Stadium, which is due to be completed in 2016.

Peterjon Cresswell

TICKETS & TRAVEL

Tickets are sold at kiosks (look for KACCA) around the Luzhniki and Lokomotiv stadia or online (www.pfc-cska.com, www.spartak.com and www.fclm.ru).

The 80,000-capacity Luzhniki is in a sports complex where the 1980 Olympics were held. Take the red metro line 1 to Sportivnaya. The four sides of the ground are colour-coded and divided into four stands: B (blue) and D (green) are behind the goals, while A (yellow) hosts VIP and the press, and is opposite stand C (red). Fans of CSKA gather in stand D (£7.50) and Spartak in stand B (£8.50). Sectors A3 or C3 over the corner flags (£13) would give the neutral a good view away from any trouble.

Spartak also have a children's section in A3 (£5.50). High-paying guests (£20 and upwards) have access to the VIP restaurant, otherwise stalls sell Baltika beer, shashlik kebabs and souvenirs around the ground.

The Lokomotiv Stadium is near Cherkizovskaya on red metro line 1. Allow 25 minutes from central Okhotniy Ryad. Home fans gather in the Yuzhnaya (South, green) end, with some in the Severnaya (North, yellow), segregated from the away fans allocated there (£3 and £5). For neutrals, it is best to go in the Vostochnaya (East) or Zapadnaya (West) stands (£8.50 to £10). When playing at the Luzhniki, Lokomotiv fans gather in stands B or D.

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Keir Radnedge

THE INSIDER

The expert view on events off the pitch

Platini's peace mission

UEFA president tackles violence in Europe's most troubled region

Flashpoint...a Partizan fan in front of burning seats at the Belgrade derby with Red Star

Michel Platini is attempting to achieve the impossible: bring peace to the almost tribal enmities which have riven the Balkans for centuries.

The UEFA president is threatening that Croatia and Serbia risk being kicked out of international football if the governments, security forces and sports authorities fail to bring an end to the endless tide of crowd violence.

Bulgaria also risks being added to the list of "yellow-card" countries after events at the Levski-CSKA derby in Sofia. Police in riot gear rounded up 4,000 CSKA fans at half-time and marched them to the city centre after crowd trouble. The outcome was further trouble in the streets with damage to cars and shops.

> "We do have a problem with hooligans but are definitely ready to confront it"
> **Serbian president Boris Tadic**

Sofia police chief Anton Zlatanov was quoted as saying: "The CSKA fans broke all safety fences and there was a possibility of a pitch invasion. We had no choice but to go in. Then they threw lumps of concrete and iron and fireworks."

But fans' leaders from both clubs accused the police of setting out in search of trouble by placing 1,500 men

DOMENECH DISASTER

Raymond Domenech and the French federation were well suited to one another – and they continue to prove so, long after both should have moved on from the World Cup horror show.

Domenech ended up as a walking disaster zone for reasons which need not bear repeating yet again. However, the FFF contributed to the ongoing chaos by appointing Laurent Blanc while Domenech, technically, was still in the national manager's job.

He was then sacked without compensation on the grounds of gross misconduct. Outgoing FFF president Jean-Pierre Escalettes itemised these as not having reported the incident with Nicolas Anelka at the time, as having read out the players' protest statement and an altercation with Carlos Alberto Parreira after the conclusive defeat by South Africa.

Domenech registered for social security while launching legal action for wrongful dismissal. The only coaching he undertakes is with the juniors of a local amateur club whose parents and officials acknowledge and admire his commitment in all weathers while remaining uncertain of his motives.

Having refused to return the media's calls and messages, Domenech then turned up in *L'Express*, attacking both his World Cup rebels and "politicians or former players turned journalists" who had criticised him. The FFF should have settled with Domenech financially last autumn so both parties could have moved on. French football is the only loser.

After the fall... Domenech watches a boys' match in the Paris suburbs

UEFA'S DOUBLE STANDARDS

UEFA has a lot to say about clubs exercising financial fair play. But how about UEFA providing financial fair play for fans?

Ticket prices for the Champions League Final at Wembley on May 28 will be the most expensive ever, ranging from £80 to £300, plus a £26 administration fee.

UEFA expect income from the Champions League Final to top £14million – £3m more than last year's Final in Madrid. So much for Michel Platini wanting to encourage more children to attend. Children of the rich and well-heeled, one assumes.

No wonder he and other football bosses do not want European institutions taking too close an interest into how the

provocatively on duty both inside and outside the stadium with horses, dogs and crowd-control equipment.

The violence – a mere escalation of long-running problems in Bulgarian football – came within days of Platini's attempt to knock heads together in meetings with Croatia's president Ivo Josipovic and Serbia's Boris Tadic.

A statement issued by Tadic's office said: "Michel Platini has informed the President that UEFA would ban Serbian clubs and the national team from European competitions if violent, criminal behaviour of hooligans continued. In Serbia we do have a problem with hooligans, we are aware of it and ready for a definite confrontation with it. We will work with UEFA to prevent a recurrence of events in Genoa, which disgraced our country."

Back in October, Serbian fans forced the sixth-minute abandonment of a European Championship qualifier against Italy, who were subsequently awarded a 3-0 victory while the Serbian federation was fined £100,000.

Whether Platini can succeed where so many others have failed in so many spheres over so many years remains to be seen. He may yet have to extend the warning to Bulgaria after the Sofia derby flare-up.

The match itself? CSKA beat Levski 3-1 and both clubs had a man sent off. Ironically, two of CSKA's goals came from their Brazilian striker...Michel Platini.

sport is run. For a second time in as many months, the European Court of Justice has come down in favour of fans.

First came its snub to Sky on the pub-screening issue, then it backed national "crown jewels" laws which insist that high-status events such as the World Cup and European Championship cannot be shown in live exclusivity on pay-TV.

The fall-out risks proving immense since every member state of the European Union may now submit for approval a list of such events of public interest. The loss of guaranteed live exclusivity of the top events can only persuade the TV channels to reassess the value of broadcasting properties.

The goose is starting to wonder about her golden eggs.

Frozen out...Jordaan suffered an embarrassing defeat in his bid to win a place on FIFA's ExCo

PROFILE Danny Jordaan

South Africa 2010 supremo finds his career in limbo

Danny Jordaan says he is determined to continue in football administration but the high flying, jet-setting career of the chief 2010 World Cup organiser is now in limbo after he suffered an embarrassing defeat in his bid to win a place in the FIFA executive committee.

"I'll continue my work in football. It's not dependent on a position. There is a lot to do in the country, in the region and on the various committees I serve," he said after being thrashed in the election at the Confederation of African Football congress in Khartoum.

But just where the 59-year-old former parliamentarian will fit in remains to be seen. Jordaan's only post now is vice-president of the South African Football Association, a position created for him last June as part of his alliance with new SAFA president Kirsten Nematandani. Jordaan has always had more of an appetite for the international arena, travelling millions of miles in two World Cup bids and keeping up the tempo even while at home organising for the 2010 finals.

Any chance Jordaan has left of wanting a place at the top table of world football is dependent on him trying for election again in two years' time.

That is when CAF president Issa Hayatou comes up for re-election.

Hayatou has faced only two election opponents during his 23 years in charge of African football – Armando Machado of Angola in 2000 and Ismail Bhamjee of Botswana in 2004 – and soundly thrashed them both. But he is now weaker – both politically and physically – especially after botching up the reaction to the deadly attack on the Togo team bus before the 2010 African Nations Cup finals in Angola.

The CAF president was also fingered by the BBC for corruption in its famed pre-World Cup bid documentary.

Jordaan, who will have two years now to campaign vigorously, can pose a credible alternative to Hayatou, although he will need to get over the embarrassment of the resounding setback at the Sudan congress.

Without the support of both Hayatou and FIFA president Sepp Blatter, Jordaan stood little chance and it was no surprise he mustered only 10 votes, less than 10 percent of the poll.

> "I have my theories about what happened to me but I will keep those private"

"Ultimately it is the choice of the national federations of Africa and I can only wish the two winners well. I have my theories about what happened to me but I will keep those private," said Jordaan

Mohamed Raouraoua of Algeria finished first in a hotly contested race for two African places on the all-powerful cabinet of world football with 39 votes and becomes the newest member of the 24-man FIFA committee.

Jacques Anouma of the Ivory Coast retained his seat with 35 votes, earning another four-year term.

Mark Gleeson

www.downmagaz.com

6 of the best

Nationality switchers

Nick Bidwell profiles some of those players plying their trade as citizens of an adopted country

1 Thiago Motta

BRAZIL TO ITALY

For such an intensely patriotic country, Italy has proved surprisingly persistent in finding room in its national team for *oriundi* (foreigners of native ancestry). Ever since the three "Argentine Amigos" – Luisito Monti, Raimundo Orsi and Enrique Guaita – helped the *Azzurri* win the 1934 World Cup, the soldier-of-fortune route has regularly been taken.

On making his Italy debut against Germany in February, the Brazil-born Thiago Motta became the 37th member of the *a la carte* band. The feisty Internazionale defensive midfielder, a native of Sao Bernardo do Campo in Sao Paulo state, represented Brazil at the South American Under-17 championship in 1999 and the 2003 CONCACAF Gold Cup, but was able to turn tail thanks to a lack of full competitive games and because his Italian grandparents came from the north-eastern Rovigo province.

The *oriundi* issue continues to spark much emotive debate in the peninsula and former Inter coach Cesare Maldini spoke for many when he roundly condemned the selection of Thiago Motta – who, despite only playing in Italy for the past two-and-a-half years, seems oblivious to all the fuss.

"I didn't have the fortune to be born an Italian, but my family comes from these parts and I feel absolutely Italian," says the 28-year-old newcomer. "I don't think Brazilians consider me a traitor."

2 Asmir Begovic

CANADA TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Mention the name of giant Stoke City goalkeeper Asmir Begovic to Canadian football fans and the chances are they will not respond with warm words or sympathy.

Born in a Bosnian town in the former Yugoslavia but brought up in the Canadian city of Edmonton, Begovic figured prominently for Canada's Under-20 side before earning a place on the bench for the full national team.

However, in August 2009, less than three months after telling a Vancouver radio station that he had no intention of switching allegiance to Bosnia, he did just that, making his debut as a late substitute in a World Cup qualifier against Estonia last year.

Cue unbridled outrage among Canuck followers of the game, with lots of talk of ship-jumping and betrayal, and calls for him to pay back the money spent on him as part of the country's youth development programme.

For his part, Begovic insists he did want to play for Canada but was rarely contacted by the Canadian Soccer Association, so was not sure he was part of their plans.

Take your pick who you believe.

3 Kevin-Prince Boateng

GERMANY TO GHANA

At the same time as his half-brother – Manchester City defender Jerome Boateng – was carving out a niche for himself in the Germany side, Kevin-Prince Boateng decided last year that the *Nationalmannschaft* was simply not for him, Instead, he took advantage of his father's lineage to make himself available for Ghana's 2010 World Cup expedition to South Africa, where a string of excellent displays in midfield brought him plaudits aplenty and a move to Milan.

Who would have guessed that the Berliner would end up slipping through Germany's fingers? Not only had he played for the country of his birth at every level from Under-15 to Under-21 (41 games in all), he was also part of the Deutschland football family, related on his mother's side to Helmut Rahn, scorer of two goals in Germany's 1954 World Cup Final victory over Hungary.

The youngster desperately wanted to figure in the senior Germany side, revealing as much when turning down Ghana's overtures as long ago as 2006, but after becoming increasingly frustrated at not being able to make the final step up the German representative ladder, he turned to plan B – and pre-eminence with the Black Stars. ➤

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4 Roberto Colautti

ARGENTINA TO ISRAEL

Born and raised in the Argentinian city of Cordoba, Roberto Colautti's international career has by no means been free of complications.

On starting out with Israel in the autumn of 2006 he was only a temporary resident of the country, and when FIFA decided to tighten up their eligibility rules a year later – insisting that only full citizens could play for a national team – the game looked up for a striker who, despite having a naturalisation application in the works, was still three years' residence away from the final stamp of approval.

There was, however, no need for him to worry. Anxious to retain the services of a player who had scored six goals in seven Euro 2008 qualifiers, and had proved himself a prolific taker of chances for top domestic side Maccabi Haifa, the Israeli federation appealed to the interior ministry to wave him through – and a passport was ready within weeks.

Of Italian descent, Colautti figured in his homeland for Buenos Aires clubs Banfield and Boca Juniors before moving to Maccabi Haifa seven years ago. He could not stop scoring in his first two seasons in Israel, providing the platform for the club's league titles in 2005 and 2006.

He later endured an injury-plagued spell in Germany with Borussia Monchengladbach before returning to Israel to play for Maccabi Tel Aviv in March last year.

5 Ludovic Obraniak

FRANCE TO POLAND

In the 1950s and 1960s the French national team owed much of their life-force to a Polish immigrant hardcore of Maryan Wisnieski, Leon Glovacki, Thadee Cisowski, Robert Budzynski and the legendary Raymond Kopa.

So it must have made a pleasant change for Polish fans to hear, in early 2009, that the trend had been reversed when Lille's attacking midfielder Ludovic Obraniak, a son of the eastern French region of Lorraine, had renounced a future with *Les Bleus* to wear the white and red of the land of his grandfather.

A graduate of the Metz academy, Obraniak gained his one and only France Under-21 cap in a friendly against Spain in 2004, but technically he still remained an international free agent – and five years on he definitively pledged himself to Poland. In Polish law, citizenship passes along the bloodline from father to son, so there was not even the need for a naturalisation paper chase.

Accusations of disloyalty to France inevitably followed, but Obraniak claims he was only being true to his roots, declaring: "My background is Polish. I've a real attachment to Polish culture."

Given his chance at international level by Leo Beenhakker, the decision has worked out well for Obraniak and his grandfather's homeland. After scoring twice on his debut, against Greece in July 2009, he has now established himself as Poland's playmaker.

6 Sebastian Soria

URUGUAY TO QATAR

Reflecting the diverse migrant workforce in the Middle East, Qatar's international fortunes are hugely reliant on their ability to assimilate the non-indigenous. And of all the naturalised crew they have assembled, no one has contributed more to the Gulf state's cause than Uruguay-born striker Sebastian Soria. For the past five years, he has supplied them with goals galore as well as a much-needed physical presence at the point of attack.

Once the spearhead of Montevideo club Liverpool, Soria admits he did not know where to find Qatar on a map when he was first approached about a move there in 2004. He took the plunge anyway and has had absolutely no reason to regret the switch, his unerring finishing paving the way for domestic league stardom – first at Al Gharafa, then with Qatar Sports Club – followed by citizenship and the chance to play international football.

In his homeland, where the national side is nothing less than a religion to supporters, the tendency is to sneer at Soria. But the 27-year-old is unrepentant.

"I made my choice. I made it with my head and my heart," he says. "Qatar brought me on as a professional and in return I do my best for them on the field of play.

"I give my all to these colours. I show my commitment in every game." WS

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World Service

The ultimate Global news & results section

Gripping stuff... Shakhtar Donetsk's Tomas Hubschman (left) and Mirko Vucinic of Roma tussle in the Champions League

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Derby day...Celtic's Scott Brown (left) and El Hadji Diouf of Rangers

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Top...Messi (left) beats Ronaldo

ARGENTINA

World's top two meet

Lionel Messi upstaged Cristiano Ronaldo when the pair met for the first time in a full international. After Ronaldo had cancelled out Angel Di Maria's opener for Argentina, Messi wrapped things up for the South Americans with a last-minute penalty to inflict a first defeat on Portugal coach Paulo Bento.

Carlos Tevez – who had missed Argentina's match with Brazil in November with a "muscle problem" but then played for Manchester City the following weekend – was dropped for the game, with Argentinian FA president Julio Grondona explaining: "He didn't come to play, and then did so for his club. The coaching staff didn't like that attitude."

BRAZIL

London date

The *Selecao* will play Scotland in a friendly on March 27 at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium.

CAMEROON

Mbuta's debut winner

A debut goal from Matthew Mbuta, who plays his club football for Crystal Palace Baltimore in the USA, gave Cameroon a 1-0 win away to Macedonia.

CHILE

Bielsa saga over

Marcelo Bielsa ended speculation that he will stay on as national coach, saying: "I quit. I agree, and regret, that it's turned into a soap opera but, honestly, I don't feel responsible for that."

RESULTS

2012 AFC CHALLENGE CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs

Feb 9 - Phnom Penh
Cambodia 3 (El Nasa 48, 53, Laboravy 59)
Macau 1 (Leong Ka-hang 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,000. **Ref:** Sgt (Mya)
Cambodia: Mic - Raksmey, Tiny, Narith, Piseth, Laboravy (Rithy 69), Sothearath, Udom (Sokngon 61), Sopanha, Sokumpheak, El Nasa (Veasna 78).
Macau: Leong Chon-kit - Ho Wai-tong, Herculano, Kwok Siu-tin, Kong Cheng-hou, Lao Pak-kin, Geofredo, Che Chi-man, Cheang Cheng-ieong, Ho Man-hou (Vinicio 66), Leong Chong-in (Leong Ka-hang 52).

Feb 9 - Bacolod
Philippines 2 (Caligdong 43, P Younghusband 90+4)
Mongolia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Yu (Tai)
Philippines: Etheridge - Gier, Del Rosario (Sabio 70), Borromeo, Gener (S Greatwich 46), J Younghusband, P Younghusband, De Jong (Jaugan 89), Jonsson, Caligdong, Araneta.
Mongolia: Tseveensuren - Olzvoi (Bekhbat 90+2), Lkhumbengarav, Tserenjav, Garidmagnai, Amgalan, Zorigt (Tsatsral 64), Pagamsuren, Norjmoo, Tsedenbal (Batchuluun 82), Togsbayar.
Sent off: Pagamsuren 25min.

Feb 10 - Kaoshiung
Taiwan 5 (Lin Cheng-yi 10, Chang Han 22, 56, Chen Po-liang 44, Lo Chih-an 49)
Laos 2 (Thongkhen 65, Syvilay 73)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Ng (HK)
Taiwan: Lin Po-cheng - Chen Shan-fu, Chang Yung-hsien, Lin Cheng-yi, Chen Yu-lin, Tsai Hsien-tang, Chan Che-yuan (Wu Chun-ching 60), Lo Chih-an (Liu Chi-chao 79; Wu Pai-ho 90+3), Chen Po-liang, Chang Han, Lo Chih-en.
Laos: Somvang - Phommapanya, Pinkeo, Hanevilay, Sysomvang, Dao (Soukaphone 52), Manolom (Liththideth 76), Inthammavong (Syvilay 46), Thongkhen, Lamnao, Sayavutthi.

Still to play: Bhutan v Afghanistan (Mar 23)

2nd legs

Feb 16 - Vientiane
Laos 1 (Soukaphone 82)
Taiwan 1 (Chen Po-liang 65)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,300. **Ref:** Abdul Wahad (Mly)
Taiwan 6-3 on agg
Laos: Keosouvandaeng - Phommapanya, Namthavixay, Hanevilay (Syvilay 64), Sysomvang, Liththideth, Manolom (Inthammavong 72), Thongkhen, Lamnao (Phaphouvanin 56), Soukaphone, Sayavutthi. *Sent off: Inthammavong 86min.*
Taiwan: Lin Po-cheng (Chung Kuang-tien 50) - Chen Shan-fu, Chang Yung-hsien, Lin Cheng-yi, Chen Yu-lin, Tsai Hsien-tang, Chan Che-yuan (Wu Chun-ching 87), Lo Chih-an, Chen Po-liang, Chang Han, Lo Chih-en.

Feb 16 - Macau
Macau 3 (Vernon Wong 62, Leong Ka-hang 73, Vinicio 75)
Cambodia 2 (Borey 45+2, El Nasa 107)
Aet. **HT:** 0-1. **90mins:** 3-1. **Att:** 100.
Ref: Perera (SLa)
Cambodia 5-4 on agg
Macau: Leong Chon-kit - Lam Ka-pou, Ho Wai-tong, Kwok Siu-tin (Ho Man-hou 71), Kong Cheng-hou, Lao Pak-kin, Geofredo, Che Chi-man, Cheang Cheng-ieong (Leong Ka-hang 46), Vernon Wong, Leong Chong-in (Vinicio 55).
Cambodia: Mic - Raksmey (Narith 38), Tiny, Pancharong, Piseth, Laboravy, Rithy, Sothearath, Sopanha (Sokngon 72), Borey (El Nasa 61), Sokumpheak.

Still to play: Mongolia v Philippines (Mar 15); Afghanistan v Bhutan (Mar 25)

Winners enter the qualifying group stage

Qualifying group stage draw

Group A
In Yangon, Myanmar

Bangladesh
Myanmar
Palestine
Philippines OR Mongolia

Matchdays: March 21, 23, 25, 2011

Group B
In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

India
Pakistan
Taiwan
Turkmenistan

Matchdays: March 21, 23, 25, 2011

Group C
In Male, Maldives

Cambodia
Kyrgyzstan
Maldives
Tajikistan

Matchdays: March 21, 23, 25, 2011

Group D
In Kathmandu, Nepal

Nepal
North Korea
Sri Lanka
Bhutan OR Afghanistan

Matchdays: April 7, 9, 11, 2011

Top 2 in each group qualify for the finals, to be staged in 2012

CYPRUS TOURNAMENT

Semi-finals

Feb 8 - Nicosia
Cyprus 0
Sweden 2 (Hysen 26, Berg 45+1)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 2,000. **Ref:** Tudor (Rom)
Cyprus: Georgallides (Kissas 56) - Katsavakis (Panagi 46), Merkis, Garpozis, Poursaitidis, Aloneftis (Avraam 61), Charalambidis (Mytides 63), Michael (Demetriou 46), Satsias (Elia 69), Makrides (Efrem 55), Okkas.
Sweden: Wiland - A Johansson, J Olsson, Almeback, Wendt, R Elm, Wernbloom (Eriksson 89), Hysen, Toivonen (Durmaz 78), M Olsson (Gerndt 66), Berg (Bengtsson 89).

Feb 8 - Paralimni
Romania 2 (Alexa 34, 44)
Ukraine 2 (Rakytskyi 23, Milevskyi 32)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Johannesson (Swe)
Ukraine 4-2 on pens (no extra-time)
Romania: Pantilimon - Maftei, Gardos, Papp, Rat, Roman (Ilie 58), Muresan (Apostol 79), Alexa, Deac, Bucur (Zicu 57), Sburlea (Ganea 68).
Ukraine: Pyatov (Shovkovskyi 90+3) - Husiev, Chygrynskyi, Rakytskyi, Fedoryv, Konoplyanka (Yarmolenko 69), Aliyev (Kravets 68), Tymoshchuk, Stepanenko (Rotan 62), Devic (Morozyuk 46), Milevskyi.

Third-place play-off

Feb 9 - Paralimni
Cyprus 1 (Konstantinou 84)
Romania 1 (Torje 56)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,500. **Ref:** Shvetov (Ukr)
Romania 5-4 on pens (no extra-time)
Cyprus: Kissas (Morfis 46) - Ella (Charalambidis 70), Dobrasinovic, Sielis, Avraam, Makrides (Panagi 69), Demetriou, Michael, Pavlou (Aloneftis 75), Efrem (Mitidis 82), Konstantinou.
Romania: Tatarusanu - Rapa, Tamas, Grigore, Salagean (Rat 68), Torje, Florescu, Ropotan, Zicu (Bucur 85), Stancu (Ilie 68), Marica.

Final

Feb 9 - Nicosia
Sweden 1 (Elmander 7)
Ukraine 1 (Devic pen 20)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Trattou (Cyp)
Ukraine 5-4 on pens (no extra-time)
Sweden: Isaksson - Lustig, Granqvist, Majstorovic (Mellberg 46), Safari (Stenman 78), A Svensson (Eriksson 78), Kallstrom, S Larsson, Elmander (Bajrami 60), Wilhelmsson, Ibrahimovic (V Elm 46).
Ukraine: Shovkovskyi - Romanchuk, Fedetskyi, Kucher, Yarmolenko (Aliyev 64), Rotan, Mykhalyk, Olinyk (Morozyuk 73), Devic (Konoplyanka 46), Stepanenko (Tymoshchuk 71), Kravets.

NATIONS CUP

Feb 8 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 3 (Gibson 60, Duff 66, Fahey 83)
Wales 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 19,783. **Ref:** Courtney (NIr)
Rep Ireland: Given - O'Shea (O'Dea 85), St Ledger, Dunne, Clark, Coleman (Fahey 58), Whelan (Green 76), Gibson (Wilson 81), Duff (Keogh 71), Walters, Doyle (Long 46).
Wales: Hennessey - Eardley (Gunter 46), D Collins, J Collins, Ricketts (Nyatanga 83), Crofts, Vaughan (Ledley 61), King, Robson-Kanu (Eastwood 68), Church, Earnshaw (Easter 80).

Feb 9 - Dublin
Northern Ireland 0
Scotland 3 (Miller 19, McArthur 32, Commons 51)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 18,742. **Ref:** Connolly (RIr)
Northern Ireland: Tuffey - McArdle (Hodson 46), Baird, McAuley, Craigan (Thompson 66), McCourt, C Evans, Davis (Norwood 58), McCann (Healy 46), McGinn (Boyce 72), Patterson.
Scotland: McGregor - Hutton, S Caldwell, Berra, Bardsley (M Wilson 57), Morrison (Maguire 79), Adam (Bannan 57), Commons (Conway 72), McArthur, Naismith (Snodgrass 58), Miller (D Wilson 90).

NATIONS CUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rep Ireland	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Scotland	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
N Ireland	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Wales	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

08.02.11 Rep of Ireland v Wales 3-0
09.02.11 Northern Ireland v Scotland..... 0-3
24.05.11 Rep of Ireland v N Ireland
25.05.11 Wales v Scotland
27.05.11 Wales v Northern Ireland
29.05.11 Rep of Ireland v Scotland

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, February 6

Feb 6 - Vila Real de Santo Antonio, Portugal
Poland 1 (Plizga 15)
Moldova 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 150. **Ref:** Anjos Santos (Por)
Poland: Sandomierski - Kikut, Celeban, Wojtkowiak, Wolakiewicz, Pawlowski, Plizga, Gol, Borysiuk (Wilk 79), Kucharczyk (Rzezniczak 46), D Nowak.
Moldova: Stanislav Namasco - Bordian, Golovatenco (Armas 78), Racu (Bulgaru 63), Bolohan, Tigirlas (Patras 46), Epureanu, Cebotaru (Andronic 52), Suvorov (Calincov 64), Picusciac (Bugaiov 59), Doros.

Tuesday, February 8

Feb 8 - Malabo
Equatorial Guinea 2 (Ekedo pen 53, Maigue og 74)
Chad 0
HT: 0-0

No turning back...Bielsa

ENGLAND

Cole is fans favourite

Chelsea's Ashley Cole, who was named the national team's player of the year for 2010 by fans voting on the FA website, became England's most-capped full-back when he made his 87th appearance in the 2-1 win away to Denmark.

Second-half substitute Scott Parker won his fourth cap, with each one being awarded while he was playing for a different club: Charlton Athletic, Chelsea, Newcastle United and now West Ham United.

FRANCE

Evra left again

Patrice Evra was omitted from the squad to face Brazil, despite completing his five-match ban following the revolt against then-coach Raymond Domenech during the World Cup.

GHANA

Four for starters

New coach Goran Stevanovic began his reign with a 4-1 win against Togo.

Meanwhile, Ghana has pulled out of the bidding process to stage the Under-17 World Cup in 2013. A choice between Denmark and the United Arab Emirates will be made in March.

10 goals scored by Schalke striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar in Holland's last six internationals

Feb 8 - Antwerp, Belgium
Ghana 4 (Adiyiah 7, Jonathan Mensah 62, Akakpo og 68, Inkoom 82)
Togo 1 (Amewou pen 50)
HT: 1-0
Ghana: Kingson - Paintsil, Vorsah (Jonathan Mensah 46), John Mensah (Boye 46), Addy, Annan (Agyemang-Badu 46), Asamoah, Muntari (Kwesi Asare 46), Kumordzi (Boateng 46), Adiyiah, Tagoe (Inkoom 46).
Togo: Tchagouni - Mango, Toure, Akakpo, Romao (Videgla 46), Amewou, Gakpe (F Ayite 46), Salifou (Abraw 46), J Ayite (Sackey 46), Langueh, Boukhari (Akpo Akilou 46).

Feb 8 - Valence, France
Ivory Coast 1 (Ya Konan 3)
Mali 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Castro (Fra)
Ivory Coast: Gnanhouan - Tiene, Demel, Romaric, Eboue, Fae (Angoua 46), Tiote, Gervinho (Doumbia 78), Drogba, Ya Konan (Boka 45; Coulibaly 54), Kalou (Gohouri 90+1).
Mali: S Diakite (Sissoko 46) - A Coulibaly (Cisse 46), Berthe (Kante 46), D Diakite, Tamboura, M Diarra, S Diarra (M Maiga 73), K Traore (Sow 46), A Traore (I Keita 56), Samassa (Diabate 46), Dembele (N'Diaye 46).

Feb 8 - Moquegua
Peru 1 (Contreras 41)
Panama 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)
Peru: Delgado - Revoredo, Contreras, Ramos (Espinoza 66), Vilchez, Tragodara (Gonzalez 46), Cruzado (Yotun 46), Guevara (Sotil 46), Advincula (Lobaton 46), Aguirre (Rossel 88), Fano.
Panama: Penedo - Dasent, Baloy, Cedeno (G Torres 46), Vasquez (Romero 74), Velez (Addles 63), Bonaga (Haywood 81), Davis, Cooper (Buitrago 30), Tejada (Sanchez 75), B Perez.

Wednesday, February 9

Feb 9 - Tirana
Albania 1 (E Bulku 62)
Slovenia 2 (Novakovic 24, Dedic pen 90)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Koukoulakis (Gre)
Albania: Ujkani (Beqaj 46) - Vangjeli (L Vrapi 74), Lila, Dallku (Muzaka 56), Teli, Duro (S Bulku 56), E Bulku, E Vrapi, Lala, Bogdani (Bakaj 64), Salihi (Memushaj 81).
Slovenia: J Handanovic - Cesar, Brecko, Jokic, Suler, Birsa (Ilicic 58), Bacinovic (Sukalo 66), Radosavljevic, Kirm (Andelkovic 87), Matavz (Dedic 46), Novakovic (Ljubijankic 68).

Feb 9 - Lagos, Portugal
Andorra 1 (Ayala 52)
Moldova 2 (Picusciac 66, Bugaiov 90+4)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lopes (Por)
Andorra: Gomes - Rubio (Escura 60), Bernaus, Sonejee, I Lima, Juli Sanchez (E Garcia 50), Martinez (Maneiro 88), Gomez, Jimenez (Moreno 50), Vales, Ayala. *Sent off: I Lima 37min.*
Moldova: Calancea - Racu (Gheorghiev 46), Golovatenco, Armas, Bolohan, Bordian (Andronic 45+2), Epureanu, Patras (Cebotaru 46), Suvorov, Doros (Picusciac 57), Bugaiov. *Sent off: Suvorov 54min.*

Feb 9 - Limassol, Cyprus
Armenia 1 (Manucharyan pen 60)
Georgia 2 (A Iashvili 23, Siradze 34)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Giannis (Cyp)
Armenia: Kasparov - Mkoyan, Arakelyan (Yuspashyan 46), Hovsepyan, Hayrapetyan, Artak Edigaryan, Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Pizzelli, Ghazaryan, Malakyan, Manucharyan (A Aleksanyan 85).
Georgia: Loria (Revishvili 46) - Salukvadze, Khubutia, Kaladze (Amisulashvili 46), Kobiashvili (Kvirkvelia 46), Daushvili, Khizanishvili (Kakubava 57), Gogua (Vatsadze 46), Ananidze, A Iashvili (Merebashvili 50), Siradze.

Feb 9 - Dubai, UAE
Azerbaijan 0
Hungary 2 (Rudolf 37, Hajnal 81)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 500. **Ref:** Abdulkarim (UAE)
Azerbaijan: Agayev - Sadygov, V Huseynov, Allahverdiyev, Melikov (J Huseynov 83), Abishov, Shukurov, Amirguliyev, Mammadov (Isayev 70), Javadov, M Huseynov (Aliyev 46).
Hungary: Kiraly (Fulop 46) - Lazar, Vanczak, Juhasz, Laczko (Vermes 70), Gera, Koman (Hajnal 46), Elek (Varga 84), Dzsudzsak, Rudolf (Vadocz 46), Priskin (Tokoli 46).

Feb 9 - Antalya, Turkey
Belarus 1 (V Hleb pen 44)
Kazakhstan 1 (Ostapenko 88)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 1,500. **Ref:** Banari (Mol)
Belarus: Zhevnov (Amelchenko 46) - Martynovich (Sosnovsky 85), Molosh (Yurevich 46), Omelyanchuk, Shitov, Tigorev (Bychenok 46), A Hleb, Kislyak (Kalachev 72), Kulchy (Krivets 46), V Hleb, Rodionov (Kutuzov 46). *Sent off: A Hleb 90min, V Hleb 90min.*
Kazakhstan: Sidelnikov (Loria 46) - Abdulin, Chernyshov (Nurdauletov 85), Chichulin (Kislitsyn 85), Smakov, Karpovich, Nurgaliyev (Shomko 85), Zhumaskaliyev (Ostapenko 46), Azovsky (Skorykh 66), Khiznichenko (Finonchenko 80), Konysbaev.

Feb 9 - Ghent
Belgium 1 (Witsel 60)
Finland 1 (Porokara 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Zimmerman (Swi)
Belgium: Proto - Ciman, Kompany, Simons, Van Buyten, G Gillet (Van Damme 57), Vertonghen, Witsel, Chadli (Mertens 57), Hazard (Vleminckx 81), Lukaku (El Ghanassy 81).
Finland: Hradecky - Lampi (Patronen 63), Moisander, Raitala, Toivio, R Eremenko, A Eremenko (Porokara 55), Hamalainen (Mannstrom 63), Hetemaj (Riski 55), Sparv (Venalainen 82), Forssell (Aaritalo 63).

Feb 9 - Antalya, Turkey
Bulgaria 2 (Popov pen 40, pen 83)
Estonia 2 (Vassiljev pen 19, pen 80)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 200. **Ref:** Lengyel (Hun)
Bulgaria: Mihailov (Peykov 70) - Manolev, Zanev (Minev 89), Angelov (Bodurov 46), Georgiev (Genkov 86), Yankov (Yanev 66), Popov, Makriev, Rangelov (Dimitrov 46), I Ivanov, S Petrov.
Estonia: Londak (Kotenko 46) - Rahn, Kruglov (Sisov 90), Dmitrijev, Oper (Purje 63), Kink (S Puri 39), Vunk, Vassiljev, Klavan, Morozov, Enar Jaager.

Feb 9 - Obidos, Portugal
Cape Verde Islands 1 (Heldon 62)
Burkina Faso 0
HT: 0-0
Cape Verde: Ernesto - Gege, Varela, Nando, Stopira, Dario (Tips), Sidnei (Joazimar), Babanco (Nilson), Roni, Lito (Jerson Ribeiro), Heldon (Rambe).

Feb 9 - Pula
Croatia 4 (Eduardo 9, Kalinic 13, 61, Ilicevic 74)
Czech Republic 2 (Sivok 20, Rosicky 45+1)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 9,500. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Croatia: Runje - Srna, Corluka (Lovren 46), Simunic, Pranjic (Strinic 46), Vukojevic (Dujmovic 46), Rakitic, Ilicevic (Vrsaljko 81), Eduardo (Petric 46), Kranjcar, Kalinic (Jelavic 63).
Czech Republic: Cech - Pospech, R Hubnik, Sivok, M Kadlec (Limbersky 76), Hubschman, Polak (Rajnoch 81), Petrzela (M Hubnik 57), Rosicky (Stajner 63), Plasil (Pudil 68), Rezek (Necid 46).

Feb 9 - Copenhagen
Denmark 1 (Agger 7)
England 2 (Bent 10, Young 68)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 25,235. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Denmark: T Sorensen - C Poulsen, Mathias Jorgensen (Kjaer 46), Agger, S Poulsen (Wass 46), Jacobsen (Silberbauer 60), Kvist (Vingaard 90), Eriksen, Krohn-Dehli (Pedersen 70), Rommedahl (Enevoldsen 82), Bendtner.
England: Hart - G Johnson, Dawson (Cahill 60), Terry, A Cole (Baines 81), Lampard (Barry 46), Wilshere (Parker 46), Walcott (Downing 67), Rooney (Young 46), Milner, Bent.

Feb 9 - San Salvador
El Salvador 1 (Burgos 15)
Haiti 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Espana (Gtm)
El Salvador: Portillo - Garcia, Anaya, Marvin Gonzalez, Umanzor, Turcios, Alvarez (Bautista 69), Romero (E Sanchez 84), Quintanilla (Baires 78), Alas, Burgos (Blanco 87).
Haiti: Jean-Zephirin - Alcenat (Herold 46), Fellinga (Paul 76), Lafrance, Bertin, Joseph, K Pierre-Louis, Hilaire (Constant 46), Aveska (Duverger 84), Fucien (Alexandre 57), Norde. *Sent off: Joseph 55min.*

Feb 9 - Paris
France 1 (Benzema 54)
Brazil 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 79,712. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
France: Lloris - Sagna, Rami, Mexes, Abidal, M'Vila (Diaby 59), A Diarra, Gourcuff (Cabaye 85), Menez (Remy 66), Malouda, Benzema (Gameiro 85).
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Daniel Alves, Thiago Silva, David Luiz, Lucas, Andre Santos, Robinho (Sandro 67), Elias (Andre 88), Alexandre Pato (Hulk 85), Renato Augusto (Jadson 58), Hernanes. *Sent off: Hernanes 39min.*

Feb 9 - Mantes-la-Ville, France
Gabon 2 (Nguema 23, Cousin pen 53)
DR Congo 0
HT: 1-0
Gabon: Ovono (Bidonga) - Bamba (Moudounga), Brou Apanga, Ecuele Manga, Ambourouet (Ze Ondo), Palun (Nze Haroun), W Aubameyang (Moubamba), Mbanangoye (Ndoumbou), Nguema (Madinda), P-E Aubameyang (Meye), Cousin (Antchouet).
DR Congo: Mandanda (Makalambay) - Mampuya (Kamavuaka), Tshinyama, Mabiala, Mulemo, Mbuyi (Kinkela), Mulumbu (Zola), Mununga, Matumona (N'Zuzi Bundebele), Mbayo (Mombongo), Mokulu.

Feb 9 - Dortmund
Germany 1 (Klose 16)
Italy 1 (Rossi 81)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 60,196. **Ref:** Braamhaar (Hol)
Germany: Neuer - Lahm (Boateng 64), Mertesacker, Badstuber (Hummels 64), Aogo, Khedira, Schweinsteiger, Muller (Gotze 46), Ozil, Podolski, Klose (Grosskreutz 75).
Italy: Buffon - Cassani (Maggio 53), Ranocchia, Bonucci, Chiellini (Criscito 78), Thiago Motta (Aquilani 63), Montolivo, De Rossi, Mauri (Giovinco 74), Pazzini (Borriello 46), Cassano (Rossi 46).

Feb 9 - Larissa
Greece 1 (Fetfatzidis 63)
Canada 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 14,800. **Ref:** Moen (Nor)
Greece: Sifakis (Chalkias 46) - Tzavellas, Moras, Torosidis (Vyntra 46), Papastathopoulos, Karagounis, Ninis, Katsouranis (Kafes 46), Fetfatzidis, Limberopoulos (Kone 61), Salpigidis (Mitroglou 46; Georgiadis 69).
Canada: Borjan - Straith, Cann, Jakovic, Peters, Johnson (Pacheco 82), Hutchinson, Simpson (Ricketts 78), Jackson (Edgar 66), De Rosario, Ocean (Friend 46).

Feb 9 - Lisbon
Guinea-Bissau 3 (Cicero 75, 90, 90+4)
Gambia 1 (Ceesay pen 29)
HT: 0-1

Feb 9 - Eindhoven
Holland 3 (Sneijder 28, Huntelaar 48, Kuyt pen 71)
Austria 1 (Arnautovic pen 84)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Holland: Stekelenburg - Van der Wiel, Heitinga, Mathijsen (Wisgerhof 46), Pieters, Kuyt (L De Jong 74), Janssen (Strootman 72), Sneijder (Elia 46), Van Bommel, Afellay, Huntelaar (Van Nistelrooy 72).
Austria: Macho - Klein (Pehlivan 72), Pogatetz, Prodl, Fuchs, Junuzovic (Hoffer 62), Alaba (Kavlak 85), Baumgartlinger, Schiemer, Arnautovic, Maierhofer.

*Feb 9 - La Ceiba**
Honduras 1 (Bengtson 8)
Ecuador 1 (Palacios 18)
HT: 1-1
Ecuador 5-4 on pens
Honduras: N Valladares - Figueroa, Jhony Palacios, Leveron, Sabillon (Beckeles 82), Alvarez (R Nunez 58), Thomas, W Palacios (Claros 46), E Martinez (Rojas 72), Bengtson, Costly (Acevedo 63).
Ecuador: Elizaga - Paredes, Guagua, W Ayovi, G Caicedo (I Mina 50), Palacios (Rojas 64), Saritama (Nazareno 67), Castillo (Quinonez 61), Noboa, Arroyo (Minda 80), J Ayovi.
**A one-off game for the Copa Municipal*

Feb 9 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Iran 1 (Khalatbari 90)
Russia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 23,000. **Ref:** Albadwawi (UAE)
Iran: Rahmati - J Hosseini, Aghili, Teymourian, Hadadifar, M Nouri (Mobali 90), K Heydari, Hajsafi, Gholami (H Nowroozi 50), Afshin (G Rezaei 63), Khalatbari. *Sent off: Khalatbari 90+1min.*
Russia: Akinfeev - A Berezutsky (Bilyaletdinov 46), Ignashevich, V Berezutsky, Shishkin (Anyukov 46), Denisov, Zyryanov, Bystrov (Pavlyuchenko 46), Torbinsky (Mamaev 46), Kerzhakov (Semshov 69), Arshavin.

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HONDURAS

Temporary leaders

Having failed to secure Juan Carlos Osorio's release from Colombian club Once Caldas in order to take up the post of Honduras coach, Javier Padilla, boss of the country's Under-20s, and Reynaldo Clavasquin, who was an assistant to former interim manager Juan De Dios Castillo, were in charge of the national team for the 1-1 draw with Ecuador.

IRAN

Goalscorer sees red

Mohammad Reza Khalatbari scored a last-minute winner for Iran against Russia in the UAE but was then sent-off after he removed his shirt in celebration and received his second yellow card of the game.

Off...Khalatbari

ISRAEL

Coach suspended

National coach Luis Fernandez was threatened with suspension by FIFA over a long-standing dispute regarding a debt allegedly owed to Qatari club Al Rayyan, who the Frenchman coached in 2005.

Fernandez said that he expected the matter to be resolved before his side's Euro 2012 qualifying games against Latvia and Georgia in March.

ITALY

New boys victorious

Brazil-born Thiago Motta of Internazionale, who played at Under-23 level for his homeland, made his debut for Italy in the 1-1 draw away to Germany. Sebastian Giovinco, who is on loan at

INTERNATIONALS

Feb 9 - Tel Aviv
Israel 0
Serbia 2 (Z Tosic 23, Trivunovic 76)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 6,000. **Ref:** Nikolaev (Rus)
Israel: Aouate - Bondarv, Ben Haim (Ben Dayan 46), I Cohen, Gershon, Kayal (Biton 56), Natcho (A Cohen 46), E Cohen (Vermouth 46), Zahavi, Golasa (Buzaglo 56), Barda (Sahar 56).
Serbia: Jorgacevic - Ivanovic (Tomovic 66), Kolarov (Obradovic 77), Subotic, Bisevac, Petrovic (Kuzmanovic 46), Milijas (Injac 46), Ljajic, Krasic (Trivunovic 46), Z Tosic, Mrdja (Pantelic 66).

Feb 9 - Antalya, Turkey
Latvia 2 (Verpakovskis pen 42, Cauna pen 51)
Bolivia 1 (Arce pen 64)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 200. **Ref:** Bajramovic (Bos)
Latvia: Vanins - Klava, Krjauklis, Smirnovs, Cauna, Verpakovskis (Turkovs 67), Rubins (Pereplotkins 71), Gorkss, Lazdins, Rudnevs (Karlsons 78), Rafalskis.
Bolivia: Arias - Hoyos, Luis Gutierrez, Ronald Rivero (Bejarano 87), Flores (Pedriel 73), J Vaca, Robles, Raldes, M Moreno, Saucedo (Cardozo 64), Campos (Arce 46).

Feb 9 - Tripoli
Libya 3 (Sa'ad 4, 35, Al Sharif 16)
Benin 2 (Kobena 32, Omoloyossi pen 70)
HT: 3-1

Feb 9 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 2 (Da Mota 61, 81)
Slovakia 1 (Jendrisek 55)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 862. **Ref:** Thual (Fra)
Luxembourg: Joubert - Schnell, Blaise (Martino 36), Hoffmann, Mutsch, Peters (Da Mota 56), C Leweck, Bettmer, Payal, Gerson, Joachim (Siebenaler 90).
Slovakia: Mucha (Kello 75) - Pekarik (Kubik 66), Pecalka, Durica, Hubocan (Sestak 39), Karhan, Kucka (Zabavnik 64), Weiss (Stoch 64), Hamsik, Jendrisek, Nemec.

Feb 9 - Skopje
Macedonia 0
Cameroon 1 (Mbuta 75)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Kalugjerovic (Mne)
Macedonia: Nuredinovski (Bogatinov 86) - Todorovski (Lazarevski 60), Lazevski, Noveski (Sikov 54), I Mitreski (Mojsov 64), Sumulikoski, Demiri, Tasevski, Naumoski, Pandev (Ristic 46), Trickovski.
Cameroon: N'dy Assembe - Bassong (Tchoyi 53), Bong, Angbwa, N'Koulou, Mbia, Bedimo (Sadjo 53), Enoh, Nguemo (Matip 78), Webo (Mbuta 53), Eto'o (Choupo-Moting 53).

Feb 9 - Shah Alam
Malaysia 2 (Safiq 43, Amirulhadi 90)
Hong Kong 0
HT: 1-0
Malaysia: Khairul (Farizal 60) - Asraruddin, Aidil, Mahalli (Sabre 67), Fadhli, Safiq, Gurusamy (Mahathevan 80), Ashaari (Amirulhadi 67), Kunanlan, Fakhri (Idlan 55), Safee (Shahrizal 85).
Hong Kong: Yapp Hung-fai - Li Hang-wui (Tsang Kam-to 65), Deng Jinghuang (Ambassa 78), Wong Chin-hung, Chan Wai-ho, Lam Ka-wai (Cheng Lai-hin 86), Lo Kwan-yee (Chu Siu-kei 56), Lo Chi-kwan, Liu Quankun, Lee Hong-lim (Lee Wai-lim 46), Ye Jia.

Feb 9 - Valletta
Malta 0
Switzerland 0
Att: 3,000. **Ref:** Stamatis (Cyp)
Malta: Haber - Briffa, A Agius (Zerafa 80), Caruana, Mamo (Failla 64), Cohen (Sammut 90+1), Sciberras, P Fenech (Pace 56), S Bajada, Schembri (Woods 85), M Mifsud.
Switzerland: Benaglio - Lichtsteiner, Von Bergen, Grichting (Affolter 31), Ziegler, Derdiyok, Schwegler (Dzemaili 41), Inler (Fernandes 73), Stocker (Shaqiri 62), Frei (D Degen 80), Yakin (Streller 46).

Feb 9 - Atlanta, USA
Mexico 2 (J Hernandez 48, Pacheco 55)
Bosnia-Herzegovina 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)
Mexico: Corona - F Rodriguez, Salcido, Moreno, Aguilar, Torrado, I Castro (Zavala 89), G Dos Santos (De Nigris 58), Pacheco (Calderon 73), Barrera (Cardenas 68), J Hernandez (L Perez 80).
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Hasagic - Mujdza, Spahic, Mravac, Besic, Pjanic, Misimovic, Salihovic (Subasic 77), Lulic (Muslimovic 62), Medunjanin (Vranjes 69), Ibisevic.

Feb 9 - Marrakech
Morocco 3 (Boussoufa 16, pen 82, El Bakkali 90+2)
Niger 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Paulin (BuF)
Morocco: Mohamadina - Basser, Benatia (Nedjmi 75), Kantari, Soulaimani, Kharja (Chihani 59), Belhanda, Boussoufa (El Bakkali 88), Taarabt (Assaidi 77), Hadji (Carecela 46), Chamakh.

Feb 9 - Maputo
Mozambique 1 (Miro 58)
Botswana 1 (Moatlhaping 35)
HT: 0-1

Feb 9 - Windhoek
Namibia 1 (W Risser 35)
Malawi 2 (Wadabwa 41, Harawa 82)
HT: 1-1

Feb 9 - Lagos
Nigeria 2 (Taiwo pen 15, Ehiosun 45+2)
Sierra Leone 1 (Kabia 89)
HT: 2-0
Nigeria: Aiyenugba - Okonkwo (Olubayo 64), Yobo, Odibe (Sowemimo 82), Taiwo, Musa, Ajilore, Obi (Ubido 64), P Utaka, Odemwingie (Okoro 82), Emenike (Ehiosun 36).
Sierra Leone: Trye - Samura, Suma, Wellington, Fofanah (King 53), A Kamara (Metzger 57), Simbo (Alpha 90+4), Kallon, S Kamara (Mansaray 52), I Bangura (Kabia 67), M Bangura.

Feb 9 – Faro-Loule, Portugal
Norway 0
Poland 1 (R Lewandowski 19)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 150. **Ref:** Anjos Santos (Por)
Norway: Knudsen - Ruud, Waehler (Demidov 59), Hangeland, J A Riise, Gamst Pedersen (Moen 87), Tettey (Jenssen 46), Hauger (B H Riise 46), Grindheim, Huseklepp (Moldskred 77), Carew (Abdellaoue 59).
Poland: Szczesny - Piszczek, Glowacki, Glik, Dudka, Blaszczykowski, Matuszczyk (Gol 90), Murawski (Krychowiak 89), Obraniak (Guerreiro 79), Jelen (Grosicki 64), R Lewandowski.

Feb 9 - Geneva, Switzerland
Portugal 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo 21)
Argentina 2 (Di Maria 14, Messi pen 90)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Busacca (Swi)
Portugal: Eduardo (Rui Patricio 46) - Joao Pereira, Rolando, Bruno Alves, Fabio Coentrao, Raul Meireles (Miguel Veloso 79), Carlos Martins (Paulo Machado 85), Joao Moutinho, Nani (Danny 60), Hugo Almeida (Helder Postiga 60), Cristiano Ronaldo (Quaresma 61).
Argentina: Romero - Zanetti (Zabaleta 62), N Burdisso, G Milito, Rojo, Banega (Gago 62), Mascherano, Cambiasso (Biglia 79), Di Maria (Pastore 66), Messi, Lavezzi (Martinez 84).

Feb 9 - Serravalle
San Marino 0
Liechtenstein 1 (Polverino 57)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Banti (Ita)
San Marino: A Simoncini - F Vitaioli (Cervellini 65), Vannucci, F Bollini (Moroni 46), D Simoncini (Bacciocchi 65), Alessandro Della Valle, M Vitaioli, Mazza (Bugli 82), Berretti, Manuel Marani (Ciacci 72), Montagna (Coppini 46). *Sent off: Vannucci 3min.*
Liechtenstein: Jehle - Eberle (Kieber 57), Michael Stocklasa, Martin Stocklasa, Vogt (Wieser 57), M Buchel, Polverino, M Frick, Erne, T Beck, D Hasler (Christen 85).

Feb 9 - Dakar
Senegal 3 (P D Cisse 19, Sow 60, Ndoye 85)
Guinea 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Benouza (Alg)
Senegal: Coundoul (C Ndiaye) - Daf, Sane, Diawara, Diakhate, Gomis (Sall), Ndaw, Dia (M B Diouf), Sow (Ndoye), P D Cisse (N Ndiaye), Niang (Kamara).
Guinea: N Yattara - Ibrahima Bangoura (I Diallo), I Camara, Kalabane, D Balde, Zayatte, H Diallo, S Diallo (Conte), Soumah (K Cisse), I Yattara, Toure.

Feb 9 - Rustenburg
South Africa 2 (Somma 2, Pienaar 44)
Kenya 0
HT: 2-0
South Africa: Khune - Ngcongca (Gaxa 78), Sangweni, Khumalo (Gould 46), Tom, Pienaar (Letsholonyane 65), Jali, Khuboni (Pattison 84), Tshabalala, Parker (Serero 71), Somma (Fanteni 73).
Kenya: J Onyango - Maloba, Wamalwa (Atudo 55), M Mohammed (Wahoma 78), E Ochieng, J Mohammed (Okoth 68), Omollo, Omondi (Mugalia 57), Gateri (Kimani 64), Oliech, Mugabe (Were 56).

Feb 9 - Madrid
Spain 1 (Silva 86)
Colombia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Trutz (Slk)
Spain: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Pique, Albiol, Capdevila (Arbeloa 54), Xavi (Cazorla 54), Busquets, Xabi Alonso (Silva 75), Pedro (Llorente 81), Villa (Fernando Torres 54), Iniesta (Jesus Navas 66).
Colombia: Ospina - Armero, L Perea, Yepes, Zuniga, Guarin, Aguilar, Anchico (Sanchez 46), Ramos (Cuadrado 56), G Moreno (Rodallega 61), D Moreno.

Feb 9 - Manzini
Swaziland 0
Zambia 4 (Chamanga 15, Mbesuma 48, Chansa 56, C Mulenga 90+2)
HT: 0-1
Swaziland: Ginindza (Simelane) - Palma, Shana, Mdluli, Manyatsi, Ngomane (S Maseko), Ndzimandze, Maqhawe, P Dlamini (Ndlovu), M Dlamini (Mamba), Christie (W Maseko).
Zambia: Mweene (Kalilio) - Kasonde (Mbola), Himoonde, Chintu, Musonda (Nyambe), Chansa, Kalaba, C Katongo, Chamanga (C Mulenga), Mbesuma, F Katongo (D Banda).

Feb 9 - Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 1 (Ngassa 63)
Palestine 0
HT: 0-0
Tanzania: Kado - Nsajigwa (Shamte), Jabu, Morris, Haroub, Nditi, Aziz, Chombo (Banka), Hassan (Bonny), Bocco (Samata), Ngassa (Mrope).
Palestine: Alsidawi - Amin, Salbahdari, Belal, Shatrit, Mahajna, Abuhammad, Salhi, Abubelal, Keshkesh, Attal.

Feb 9 - Trabzon
Turkey 0
South Korea 0
Att: 20,000. **Ref:** Boiko (Ukr)
Turkey: Volkan Demirel - Servet, Serdar, Ismail, Sabri (Yigit 78), Serkan (Gokhan Gonul 46), Emre Belozoglu, Hamit Altintop (Burak 59), Selcuk Inan, Ekici (Tunay 59), Umut (Kazim-Richards 46). *Sent off: Emre Belozoglu 60min.*
South Korea: Jung Sung-ryong - Hwang Jae-won, Hong Jeong-ho, Lee Yong-rae (Choi Hyo-jin 87), Ji Dong-won (Kim Shin-wook 83), Park Chu-young, Hong Chul, Koo Ja-cheol (Yoon Bit-garam 83), Lee Jung-soo, Ki Sung-yong, Nam Tae-hee (Choi Sung-kuk 69).

Feb 9 - Puerto La Cruz
Venezuela 2 (S Rondon 24, 81)
Costa Rica 2 (Oviedo 7, Urena 60)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Gambetta (Per)
Venezuela: D Hernandez - Rosales (Chourio 90), Vizcarrondo, Perozo, G Cichero, Rincon, Seijas (Guerra 67), Arango, C Gonzalez (E Hernandez 71), S Rondon, Fedor (Arismendi 71).
Costa Rica: Navas - Oviedo, Myrie, Delgado, Marshall, Azofeifa (Guzman 69), Cubero, Mora, Bolanos (Elizondo 69), Brenes (Madrigal 46), Urena.

Monday, February 14

Feb 14 - Manama
Bahrain 0
Kuwait 0

Parma from Juventus, also won a first cap.

Substitute Giuseppe Rossi's equaliser meant Germany failed to break their 16-year winless run against the *Azzurri*.

IVORY COAST

Drogba returns

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba played his first international since last year's World Cup in a 1-1 draw against Mali which was stopped twice – the first time after a fight broke out between the players and then following a floodlight failure.

LUXEMBOURG

Da Mota double

Substitute Daniel Da Mota of F91 Dudelange scored twice as Luxembourg beat Slovakia 2-1 on a miserable night for Heart of Midlothian goalkeeper Marian Kello, who made his debut for the visitors, appearing as a second-half substitute, along with Den Haag striker Frantisek Kubik.

Slovakia coach Vladimir Weiss admitted: "The result was sensational and we have to be disappointed. But that's all I can say because, after our first goal, I couldn't see anything because of the fog."

Foggy...Luxembourg (in white)

MALTA

Keeper is spot on

Justin Haber saved two penalties as Malta drew 0-0 at home to Switzerland. The Ferencvaros goalkeeper saved spot kicks from Alexander Frei in the second minute and Gokhan Inler in the 57th minute.

FRIENDLY FIXTURES

Games announced so far, March 12 to March 30, 2011

16.03.11 Argentina v Venezuela (San Juan)
25.03.11 China v New Zealand (Nanning)
El Salvador v Syria (Dubai, UAE)
Estonia v Uruguay (Tallinn)
Finland v Bolivia (Antalya, Turkey)
Japan v Montenegro (Shizuoka)
Kuwait v Jordan (Kuwait City)
Lithuania v Poland (Kaunas)
Panama v Bolivia
Qatar v Tunisia
South Korea v Colombia
26.03.11 Mexico v Paraguay (Oakland, USA)
Portugal v Chile (Leiria)
United States v Argentina (East Rutherford)
27.03.11 Scotland v Brazil (London)
29.03.11 Belarus v Canada (Antalya, Turkey)
Costa Rica v Argentina (San Jose)
Cuba v Panama (Havana)
England v Ghana (London)
France v Croatia (Paris)
Germany v Australia (Monchengladbach)
Greece v Poland (Larissa)
Japan v New Zealand (Tokyo)
Kuwait v Palestine (Kuwait City)
Mexico v Venezuela (San Diego, USA)
Oman v Tunisia
Portugal v Finland (Aveiro)
Republic of Ireland v Uruguay (Dublin)
Slovakia v Denmark
South Korea v Montenegro (Seoul)
Ukraine v Italy
United States v Paraguay (Nashville)
30.03.11 Morocco v Angola (Tangier)

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS

Group A

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	4	4	0	0	13	1	12
Austria	3	2	1	0	9	4	7
Turkey	4	2	0	2	6	6	6
Belgium	4	1	1	2	8	8	4
Azerbaijan	3	1	0	2	2	9	3
Kazakhstan	4	0	0	4	0	10	0

03.09.10 Belgium v Germany 0-1
03.09.10 Kazakhstan v Turkey 0-3
07.09.10 Austria v Kazakhstan 2-0
07.09.10 Germany v Azerbaijan 6-1
07.09.10 Turkey v Belgium 3-2
08.10.10 Austria v Azerbaijan 3-0
08.10.10 Germany v Turkey 3-0
08.10.10 Kazakhstan v Belgium 0-2
12.10.10 Azerbaijan v Turkey 1-0
12.10.10 Belgium v Austria 4-4
12.10.10 Kazakhstan v Germany 0-3
25.03.11 Austria v Belgium
26.03.11 Germany v Kazakhstan
29.03.11 Belgium v Azerbaijan
29.03.11 Turkey v Austria
03.06.11 Austria v Germany
03.06.11 Belgium v Turkey
03.06.11 Kazakhstan v Azerbaijan
07.06.11 Azerbaijan v Germany
02.09.11 Azerbaijan v Belgium
02.09.11 Germany v Austria
02.09.11 Turkey v Kazakhstan
06.09.11 Austria v Turkey
06.09.11 Azerbaijan v Kazakhstan
07.10.11 Azerbaijan v Austria
07.10.11 Belgium v Kazakhstan
07.10.11 Turkey v Germany
11.10.11 Germany v Belgium
11.10.11 Kazakhstan v Austria
11.10.11 Turkey v Azerbaijan

Group B

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Russia	4	3	0	1	6	3	9
Rep Ireland	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Armenia	4	2	1	1	9	4	7
Slovakia	4	2	1	1	4	4	7
Macedonia	4	1	1	2	4	4	4
Andorra	4	0	0	4	1	11	0

03.09.10 Andorra v Russia 0-2
03.09.10 Armenia v Rep of Ireland 0-1
03.09.10 Slovakia v Macedonia 1-0
07.09.10 Macedonia v Armenia 2-2
07.09.10 Rep of Ireland v Andorra 3-1
07.09.10 Russia v Slovakia 0-1
08.10.10 Andorra v Macedonia 0-2
08.10.10 Armenia v Slovakia 3-1
08.10.10 Rep of Ireland v Russia 2-3
12.10.10 Armenia v Andorra 4-0
12.10.10 Macedonia v Russia 0-1
12.10.10 Slovakia v Rep of Ireland 1-1
26.03.11 Andorra v Slovakia
26.03.11 Armenia v Russia
26.03.11 Rep of Ireland v Macedonia
04.06.11 Macedonia v Rep of Ireland
04.06.11 Russia v Armenia
04.06.11 Slovakia v Andorra
02.09.11 Andorra v Armenia
02.09.11 Rep of Ireland v Slovakia
02.09.11 Russia v Macedonia
06.09.11 Macedonia v Andorra
06.09.11 Russia v Rep of Ireland
06.09.11 Slovakia v Armenia
07.10.11 Andorra v Rep of Ireland
07.10.11 Armenia v Macedonia
07.10.11 Slovakia v Russia
11.10.11 Macedonia v Slovakia
11.10.11 Rep of Ireland v Armenia
11.10.11 Russia v Andorra

Group C

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	4	3	1	0	10	1	10
Slovenia	4	2	1	1	7	3	7
Estonia	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
N Ireland	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Serbia	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
Faroe Islands	5	0	1	4	3	16	1

11.08.10 Estonia v Faroe Islands 2-1
03.09.10 Estonia v Italy 1-2
03.09.10 Faroe Islands v Serbia 0-3
03.09.10 Slovenia v N Ireland 0-1
07.09.10 Italy v Faroe Islands 5-0
07.09.10 Serbia v Slovenia 1-1
08.10.10 N Ireland v Italy 0-0
08.10.10 Serbia v Estonia 1-3
08.10.10 Slovenia v Faroe Islands 5-1
12.10.10 Estonia v Slovenia 0-1
12.10.10 Faroe Islands v N Ireland 1-1
12.10.10 Italy v Serbia ..... (awarded) 3-0
25.03.11 Serbia v N Ireland
25.03.11 Slovenia v Italy
29.03.11 Estonia v Serbia
29.03.11 N Ireland v Slovenia
03.06.11 Faroe Islands v Slovenia
03.06.11 Italy v Estonia
07.06.11 Faroe Islands v Estonia
10.08.11 N Ireland v Faroe Islands
02.09.11 Faroe Islands v Italy
02.09.11 N Ireland v Serbia
02.09.11 Slovenia v Estonia
06.09.11 Estonia v N Ireland
06.09.11 Italy v Slovenia
06.09.11 Serbia v Faroe Islands
07.10.11 N Ireland v Estonia
07.10.11 Serbia v Italy
11.10.11 Italy v N Ireland
11.10.11 Slovenia v Serbia

Group D

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	4	3	0	1	6	1	9
Belarus	4	2	2	0	3	0	8
Albania	4	1	2	1	3	4	5
Bosnia-Herz	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Romania	3	0	2	1	1	3	2
Luxembourg	4	0	1	3	0	6	1

03.09.10 France v Belarus 0-1
03.09.10 Luxembourg v Bosnia-Herz 0-3
03.09.10 Romania v Albania 1-1
07.09.10 Albania v Luxembourg 1-0
07.09.10 Belarus v Romania 0-0
07.09.10 Bosnia-Herz v France 0-2
08.10.10 Albania v Bosnia-Herz 1-1
08.10.10 Luxembourg v Belarus 0-0
09.10.10 France v Romania 2-0
12.10.10 Belarus v Albania 2-0
12.10.10 France v Luxembourg 2-0
25.03.11 Luxembourg v France
26.03.11 Albania v Belarus
26.03.11 Bosnia-Herz v Romania
29.03.11 Romania v Luxembourg
03.06.11 Belarus v France
03.06.11 Romania v Bosnia-Herz
07.06.11 Belarus v Luxembourg
07.06.11 Bosnia-Herz v Albania
02.09.11 Albania v France
02.09.11 Belarus v Bosnia-Herz
02.09.11 Luxembourg v Romania
06.09.11 Bosnia-Herz v Belarus
06.09.11 Luxembourg v Albania
06.09.11 Romania v France
07.10.11 Bosnia-Herz v Luxembourg
07.10.11 France v Albania
07.10.11 Romania v Belarus
11.10.11 Albania v Romania
11.10.11 France v Bosnia-Herz

Group E

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	4	4	0	0	12	2	12
Hungary	4	3	0	1	12	4	9
Sweden	3	2	0	1	9	4	6
Moldova	4	2	0	2	5	3	6
Finland	4	1	0	3	10	6	3
San Marino	5	0	0	5	0	29	0

03.09.10 Moldova v Finland 2-0
03.09.10 San Marino v Holland 0-5
03.09.10 Sweden v Hungary 2-0
07.09.10 Holland v Finland 2-1
07.09.10 Hungary v Moldova 2-1
07.09.10 Sweden v San Marino 6-0
08.10.10 Hungary v San Marino 8-0
08.10.10 Moldova v Holland 0-1
12.10.10 Finland v Hungary 1-2
12.10.10 Holland v Sweden 4-1
12.10.10 San Marino v Moldova 0-2
17.11.10 Finland v San Marino 8-0
25.03.11 Hungary v Holland
29.03.11 Holland v Hungary
29.03.11 Sweden v Moldova
03.06.11 Moldova v Sweden
03.06.11 San Marino v Finland
07.06.11 San Marino v Hungary
07.06.11 Sweden v Finland
02.09.11 Finland v Moldova
02.09.11 Holland v San Marino
02.09.11 Hungary v Sweden
06.09.11 Finland v Holland
06.09.11 Moldova v Hungary
06.09.11 San Marino v Sweden
07.10.11 Finland v Sweden
07.10.11 Holland v Moldova
11.10.11 Hungary v Finland
11.10.11 Moldova v San Marino
11.10.11 Sweden v Holland

Group F

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Croatia	4	3	1	0	8	1	10
Greece	4	2	2	0	4	2	8
Georgia	4	1	3	0	3	2	6
Israel	4	1	1	2	5	5	4
Latvia	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Malta	4	0	0	4	1	9	0

02.09.10 Israel v Malta 3-1
03.09.10 Greece v Georgia 1-1
03.09.10 Latvia v Croatia 0-3
07.09.10 Croatia v Greece 0-0
07.09.10 Georgia v Israel 0-0
07.09.10 Malta v Latvia 0-2
08.10.10 Georgia v Malta 1-0
08.10.10 Greece v Latvia 1-0
09.10.10 Israel v Croatia 1-2
12.10.10 Greece v Israel 2-1
12.10.10 Latvia v Georgia 1-1
17.11.10 Croatia v Malta 3-0
26.03.11 Georgia v Croatia
26.03.11 Israel v Latvia
26.03.11 Malta v Greece
29.03.11 Israel v Georgia
04.06.11 Croatia v Georgia
04.06.11 Greece v Malta
04.06.11 Latvia v Israel
02.09.11 Georgia v Latvia
02.09.11 Israel v Greece
02.09.11 Malta v Croatia
06.09.11 Croatia v Israel
06.09.11 Latvia v Greece
06.09.11 Malta v Georgia
07.10.11 Greece v Croatia
07.10.11 Latvia v Malta
11.10.11 Croatia v Latvia
11.10.11 Georgia v Greece
11.10.11 Malta v Israel

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MEXICO

De la Torre's trio

New coach Jose Manuel De la Torre saw his side beat Bosnia-Herzegovina 2-0 in the first of three friendlies they are playing in the USA.

NIGERIA

Seven heaven

The "Super Eagles" played their first game in Lagos for seven years, with new coach Samson Siasia awarding first caps to seven players – including Ekigho Ehiosun from local club Warri Wolves and Internazionale's Joel Obi – in the 2-1 win against Sierra Leone.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Camp swaps sides

Nottingham Forest goalkeeper Lee Camp, who was capped five times by England at Under-21 level, has been cleared to play for Northern Ireland by FIFA. The 26-year-old qualifies through a grandparent.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Nations' debut

Ciaran Clark of Aston Villa and Everton's Seamus Coleman both made their international debuts in the 3-0 victory over Wales in the opening game of the Nations Cup.

New boy...Coleman (left)

RWANDA

Tournament hosts

The 2016 African Nations Championship – a tournament which is restricted to home-based players in Africa – will be held in Rwanda.

Tunisia won this year's

Group G

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montenegro	4	3	1	0	3	0	10
England	3	2	1	0	7	1	7
Switzerland	3	1	0	2	5	5	3
Bulgaria	3	1	0	2	1	5	3
Wales	3	0	0	3	1	6	0

03.09.10 England v Bulgaria 4-0
03.09.10 Montenegro v Wales 1-0
07.09.10 Bulgaria v Montenegro 0-1
07.09.10 Switzerland v England 1-3
08.10.10 Montenegro v Switzerland..... 1-0
08.10.10 Wales v Bulgaria 0-1
12.10.10 England v Montenegro..... 0-0
12.10.10 Switzerland v Wales..... 4-1
26.03.11 Bulgaria v Switzerland
26.03.11 Wales v England
04.06.11 England v Switzerland
04.06.11 Montenegro v Bulgaria
02.09.11 Bulgaria v England
02.09.11 Wales v Montenegro
06.09.11 England v Wales
06.09.11 Switzerland v Bulgaria
07.10.11 Montenegro v England
07.10.11 Wales v Switzerland
11.10.11 Bulgaria v Wales
11.10.11 Switzerland v Montenegro

Group H

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Norway	3	3	0	0	5	2	9
Portugal	4	2	1	1	10	7	7
Denmark	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Cyprus	3	0	1	2	5	8	1
Iceland	3	0	0	3	2	6	0

03.09.10 Iceland v Norway 1-2
03.09.10 Portugal v Cyprus..... 4-4
07.09.10 Denmark v Iceland..... 1-0
07.09.10 Norway v Portugal 1-0
08.10.10 Cyprus v Norway..... 1-2
08.10.10 Portugal v Denmark 3-1
12.10.10 Denmark v Cyprus 2-0
12.10.10 Iceland v Portugal 1-3
26.03.11 Cyprus v Iceland
26.03.11 Norway v Denmark
04.06.11 Iceland v Denmark
04.06.11 Portugal v Norway
02.09.11 Cyprus v Portugal
02.09.11 Norway v Iceland
06.09.11 Denmark v Norway
06.09.11 Iceland v Cyprus
07.10.11 Cyprus v Denmark
07.10.11 Portugal v Iceland
11.10.11 Denmark v Portugal
11.10.11 Norway v Cyprus

Group I

EURO 2012 QUALIFIERS – GROUP I

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	3	3	0	0	10	3	9
Czech Rep	3	2	0	1	3	1	6
Scotland	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Lithuania	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Liechtenstein	3	0	0	3	1	8	0

03.09.10 Liechtenstein v Spain..... 0-4
03.09.10 Lithuania v Scotland 0-0
07.09.10 Czech Republic v Lithuania..... 0-1
07.09.10 Scotland v Liechtenstein..... 2-1
08.10.10 Czech Republic v Scotland..... 1-0
08.10.10 Spain v Lithuania 3-1
12.10.10 Liechtenstein v Czech Rep..... 0-2
12.10.10 Scotland v Spain..... 2-3
25.03.11 Spain v Czech Republic
29.03.11 Czech Rep v Liechtenstein
29.03.11 Lithuania v Spain
03.06.11 Liechtenstein v Lithuania
02.09.11 Lithuania v Liechtenstein
03.09.11 Scotland v Czech Republic
06.09.11 Scotland v Lithuania
06.09.11 Spain v Liechtenstein
07.10.11 Czech Republic v Spain
08.10.11 Liechtenstein v Scotland
11.10.11 Lithuania v Czech Republic
11.10.11 Spain v Scotland

The 9 group winners and the runner-up with the best record (against the teams finishing 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th in the respective groups) qualify automatically for the finals. The 8 remaining runners-up will be drawn in 4 head-to-head, 2-leg play-offs, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals. Co-hosts Poland and Ukraine qualify automatically

Play-off dates:
1st legs - November 11/12, 2011;
2nd legs - November 15, 2011

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

Group A

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cape Verde	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Mali	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Zimbabwe	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Liberia	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

04.09.10 Cape Verde v Mali 1-0
05.09.10 Liberia v Zimbabwe 1-1
09.10.10 Mali v Liberia 2-1
10.10.10 Zimbabwe v Cape Verde 0-0
26.03.11 Cape Verde v Liberia
26.03.11 Mali v Zimbabwe
04.06.11 Liberia v Cape Verde
04.06.11 Zimbabwe v Mali
03.09.11 Mali v Cape Verde
03.09.11 Zimbabwe v Liberia
08.10.11 Cape Verde v Zimbabwe
08.10.11 Liberia v Mali

Group B

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guinea	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Nigeria	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Ethiopia	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Madagascar	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

05.09.10 Ethiopia v Guinea 1-4
05.09.10 Nigeria v Madagascar..... 2-0
10.10.10 Guinea v Nigeria..... 1-0
10.10.10 Madagascar v Ethiopia 0-1
26.03.11 Madagascar v Guinea
26.03.11 Nigeria v Ethiopia
04.06.11 Ethiopia v Nigeria
04.06.11 Guinea v Madagascar
03.09.11 Guinea v Ethiopia
03.09.11 Madagascar v Nigeria
08.10.11 Ethiopia v Madagascar
08.10.11 Nigeria v Guinea

Group C

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mozambique	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Libya	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Zambia	2	1	0	1	4	1	3
Comoros	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

05.09.10 Mozambique v Libya 0-0
05.09.10 Zambia v Comoros 4-0
09.10.10 Comoros v Mozambique 0-1
10.10.10 Libya v Zambia..... 1-0
26.03.11 Libya v Comoros
26.03.11 Mozambique v Zambia
04.06.11 Comoros v Libya
04.06.11 Zambia v Mozambique
03.09.11 Comoros v Zambia
03.09.11 Libya v Mozambique
08.10.11 Mozambique v Comoros
08.10.11 Zambia v Libya

Group D

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cent Af Rep	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Morocco	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Tanzania	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Algeria	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

03.09.10 Algeria v Tanzania 1-1
04.09.10 Morocco v Cent Af Rep..... 0-0
09.10.10 Tanzania v Morocco 0-1
10.10.10 Cent Af Rep v Algeria 2-0
26.03.11 Algeria v Morocco
26.03.11 Tanzania v Cent Af Rep
04.06.11 Cent Af Rep v Tanzania
04.06.11 Morocco v Algeria
03.09.11 Cent Af Rep v Morocco
03.09.11 Tanzania v Algeria
08.10.11 Algeria v Cent Af Rep
08.10.11 Morocco v Tanzania

Group E

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	2	2	0	0	11	2	6
Cameroon	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
DR Congo	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Mauritius	2	0	0	2	1	10	0

04.09.10 Mauritius v Cameroon..... 1-3
05.09.10 DR Congo v Senegal 2-4
09.10.10 Cameroon v DR Congo 1-1
09.10.10 Senegal v Mauritius..... 7-0
26.03.11 DR Congo v Mauritius
26.03.11 Senegal v Cameroon
04.06.11 Cameroon v Senegal
04.06.11 Mauritius v DR Congo
03.09.11 Cameroon v Mauritius
03.09.11 Senegal v DR Congo
08.10.11 DR Congo v Cameroon
08.10.11 Mauritius v Senegal

Group F

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Gambia	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Namibia	1	0	0	1	1	3	0

Mauritania withdrew before 1st round of games

04.09.10 Gambia v Namibia..... 3-1
09.10.10 Burkina Faso v Gambia..... 3-1
26.03.11 Burkina Faso v Namibia
04.06.11 Namibia v Burkina Faso
03.09.11 Namibia v Gambia
08.10.11 Gambia v Burkina Faso

Group G

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Africa	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Niger	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Sierra Leone	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Egypt	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

04.09.10 South Africa v Niger 2-0
05.09.10 Egypt v Sierra Leone..... 1-1
10.10.10 Niger v Egypt 1-0
10.10.10 Sierra Leone v South Africa 0-0
26.03.11 Niger v Sierra Leone
26.03.11 South Africa v Egypt
04.06.11 Egypt v South Africa
04.06.11 Sierra Leone v Niger
03.09.11 Niger v South Africa
03.09.11 Sierra Leone v Egypt
08.10.11 Egypt v Niger
08.10.11 South Africa v Sierra Leone

Group H

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Benin	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
Burundi	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Rwanda	2	0	0	2	0	6	0

04.09.10 Ivory Coast v Rwanda 3-0
05.09.10 Benin v Burundi 1-1
09.10.10 Burundi v Ivory Coast..... 0-1
09.10.10 Rwanda v Benin..... 0-3
26.03.11 Ivory Coast v Benin
26.03.11 Rwanda v Burundi
04.06.11 Benin v Ivory Coast
04.06.11 Burundi v Rwanda

tournament in Sudan, beating Angola 3-0 in the Final.

SCOTLAND

Captain Kenny

Kenny Miller, who joined Turkish side Bursaspor from Rangers in the January transfer window, celebrated being handed the Scotland captaincy by scoring the opening goal against Northern Ireland.

James McArthur and Kris Commons added further goals in a 3-0 Nations Cup win.

SPAIN

Back to South Africa

The world champions have said they will return to South Africa to face an Africa XI in a match to thank those responsible for the successful hosting of the 2010 World Cup. The game will be played in June.

Dismissed...Turkey skipper Emre

TURKEY

Hiddink's men held

Hamburg striker Tunay Torun won his first cap as Guus Hiddink's side drew 0-0 against his former charges South Korea, in a game in which captain Emre Belozoglu was sent off.

UKRAINE

Penalty kings

The Euro 2012 co-hosts won the Cyprus Tournament after successive penalty shoot-out victories. Having seen off Romania after Oleksandr Shovkovksyi saved two spot kicks in a shoot-out win, they then beat Sweden 5-4 on penalties when Emir Bajrami missed the decisive kick.

03.09.11 Burundi v Benin
03.09.11 Rwanda v Ivory Coast
08.10.11 Benin v Rwanda
08.10.11 Ivory Coast v Burundi

Group I

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP I

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Sudan	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Congo	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Swaziland	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

04.09.10 Sudan v Congo 2-0
05.09.10 Swaziland v Ghana 0-3
10.10.10 Congo v Swaziland 3-1
10.10.10 Ghana v Sudan 0-0
26.03.11 Congo v Ghana
26.03.11 Sudan v Swaziland
04.06.11 Ghana v Congo
04.06.11 Swaziland v Sudan
03.09.11 Congo v Sudan
03.09.11 Ghana v Swaziland
08.10.11 Sudan v Ghana
08.10.11 Swaziland v Congo

Group J

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP J

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uganda	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Guinea-Bissau	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Angola	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Kenya	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

04.09.10 Guinea-Bissau v Kenya 1-0
04.09.10 Uganda v Angola 3-0
09.10.10 Angola v Guinea-Bissau 1-0
09.10.10 Kenya v Uganda 0-0
26.03.11 Guinea-Bissau v Uganda
26.03.11 Kenya v Angola
04.06.11 Angola v Kenya
04.06.11 Uganda v Guinea-Bissau
03.09.11 Angola v Uganda
03.09.11 Kenya v Guinea-Bissau
08.10.11 Guinea-Bissau v Angola
08.10.11 Uganda v Kenya

Group K

2012 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP K

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Botswana	5	4	1	0	6	2	13
Tunisia	5	2	1	2	7	6	7
Malawi	4	1	3	0	10	6	6
Togo	5	0	3	2	5	7	3
Chad	5	0	2	3	5	12	2

01.07.10 Chad v Togo 2-2
01.07.10 Tunisia v Botswana 0-1
09.07.10 Botswana v Chad 1-0
09.07.10 Togo v Malawi 1-1
11.08.10 Chad v Tunisia 1-3
11.08.10 Malawi v Botswana 1-1
04.09.10 Botswana v Togo 2-1
04.09.10 Tunisia v Malawi 2-2
09.10.10 Malawi v Chad 6-2
10.10.10 Togo v Tunisia 1-2
17.11.10 Botswana v Tunisia 1-0
17.11.10 Togo v Chad 0-0
26.03.11 Chad v Botswana
26.03.11 Malawi v Togo
04.06.11 Botswana v Malawi
04.06.11 Tunisia v Chad
03.09.11 Malawi v Tunisia
03.09.11 Togo v Botswana
08.10.11 Chad v Malawi
08.10.11 Tunisia v Togo

The 11 group winners, the runner-up in Group K (the only 5-team group) and the 2 other runners-up with the best record (against the teams finishing 1st and 3rd in the respective groups) qualify for the finals. Co-hosts Equatorial Guinea and Gabon qualify automatically

2011 COPA AMERICA

To be staged in Argentina

Draw & match schedule

Group A
Argentina
Bolivia
Colombia
Japan

01.07.11 Argentina v Bolivia (La Plata)
02.07.11 Colombia v Japan (Jujuy)
06.07.11 Argentina v Colombia (Santa Fe)
07.07.11 Bolivia v Japan (Jujuy)
10.07.11 Colombia v Bolivia (Santa Fe)
11.07.11 Argentina v Japan (Cordoba)

Group B
Brazil
Ecuador
Paraguay
Venezuela

03.07.11 Brazil v Venezuela (La Plata)
03.07.11 Paraguay v Ecuador (Santa Fe)
09.07.11 Brazil v Paraguay (Cordoba)
09.07.11 Venezuela v Ecuador (Salta)
13.07.11 Paraguay v Venezuela (Salta)
13.07.11 Brazil v Ecuador (Cordoba)

Group C
Chile
Mexico
Peru
Uruguay

04.07.11 Uruguay v Peru (San Juan)
04.07.11 Chile v Mexico (San Juan)
08.07.11 Peru v Mexico (Mendoza)
08.07.11 Uruguay v Chile (Mendoza)
12.07.11 Chile v Peru (Mendoza)
12.07.11 Uruguay v Mexico (La Plata)

Top 2 in each group and the 2 3rd-placed teams with the best record qualify for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals
16.07.11 Gp A 1st v 1st 3rd-place (Cordoba) (QF1)
16.07.11 Gp A 2nd v Gp C 2nd (Santa Fe) (QF2)
17.07.11 Gp B 1st v 2nd 3rd-place (La Plata) (QF3)
17.07.11 Gp C 1st v Gp B 2nd (San Juan) (QF4)

Semi-finals
19.07.11 QF1 winners v QF2 winners (La Plata)
20.07.11 QF3 winners v QF4 winners (Mendoza)

Third-place play-off
23.07.11 (La Plata)

Final
24.07.11 (Buenos Aires)

2011 UNDER-20 WORLD CUP

To be staged in Colombia, July 29-August 20

Qualifiers to date

From Asia (4 berths in total)
Australia
North Korea
Saudi Arabia
South Korea

From Europe (6 berths in total)
Austria
Croatia
England
France
Portugal
Spain

From South America (5 berths in total, inc. hosts)
Argentina
Brazil
Colombia (hosts)
Ecuador
Uruguay

African qualifiers to be played March 18-April 1 in Libya (subject to confirmation) – 4 countries will qualify

CONCACAF qualifiers to be played March 28-April 10 in Guatemala – 4 countries will qualify

Oceania qualifiers to be played April 20-29 in New Zealand – 1 country will qualify

2011 UNDER-17 WORLD CUP

To be staged in Mexico, June 18-July 10

Qualifiers to date

From Africa (4 berths in total)
Burkina Faso
Congo
Ivory Coast
Rwanda

From Asia (4 berths in total)
Australia
Japan
North Korea
Uzbekistan

From CONCACAF (5 berths in total, inc. hosts)
Canada
Jamaica
Mexico (hosts)
Panama
United States

From Oceania (1 berth in total)
New Zealand

European qualifiers to be played May 3-15 in Serbia – 6 countries will qualify

South American qualifiers to be played March 12-April 10 in Ecuador – 4 countries will qualify

2011 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

To be staged in Germany

Draw & match schedule

Group A
Canada
France
Germany
Nigeria

26.06.11 Nigeria v France (Sinsheim)
26.06.11 Germany v Canada (Berlin)
30.06.11 Canada v France (Bochum)
30.06.11 Germany v Nigeria (Frankfurt)
05.07.11 France v Germany (Monchengladbach)
05.07.11 Canada v Nigeria (Dresden)

Group B
England
Japan
Mexico
New Zealand

27.06.11 Japan v New Zealand (Bochum)
27.06.11 Mexico v England (Wolfsburg)
01.07.11 Japan v Mexico (Leverkusen)
01.07.11 New Zealand v England (Dresden)
05.07.11 England v Japan (Augsburg)
05.07.11 New Zealand v Mexico (Sinsheim)

Group C
Colombia
North Korea
Sweden
United States

28.06.11 Colombia v Sweden (Leverkusen)
28.06.11 United States v North Korea (Dresden)
02.07.11 North Korea v Sweden (Augsburg)
02.07.11 United States v Colombia (Sinsheim)
06.07.11 Sweden v United States (Wolfsburg)
06.07.11 North Korea v Colombia (Bochum)

Group D
Australia
Brazil
Equatorial Guinea
Norway

29.06.11 Norway v Equatorial Guinea (Augsburg)
29.06.11 Brazil v Australia (Monchengladbach)
03.07.11 Australia v Equatorial Guinea (Bochum)
03.07.11 Brazil v Norway (Wolfsburg)
06.07.11 Equatorial Guinea v Brazil (Frankfurt)
06.07.11 Australia v Norway (Leverkusen)

Top 2 in each group qualify for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals
09.07.11 Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd (Leverkusen) (QF1)
09.07.11 Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd (Wolfsburg) (QF2)
10.07.11 Gp C 1st v Gp D 2nd (Augsburg) (QF3)
10.07.11 Gp D 1st v Gp C 2nd (Dresden) (QF4)

Semi-finals
13.07.11 QF1 winners v QF4 winners (M'gladbach)
13.07.11 QF2 winners v QF3 winners (Frankfurt)

Third-place play-off
16.07.11 (Sinsheim)

Final
17.07.11 (Frankfurt)

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SOUTH AMERICA
Brazil starlets on top again

Man of the moment...nine-goal Neymar shows off his player of the tournament trophy after he and his team-mates clinched the Under-20 title by thrashing Uruguay 6-0

UNDER-20 CHAMPIONSHIP

If the overall standard of this year's tournament in Peru was often disappointing, especially in terms of collective play, all 10 countries can be pleased with the experience gained by promising individuals – which, after all, is the primary function of youth football.

While Brazil and Uruguay qualified for next year's Olympics – and will be joined by Argentina and Ecuador, as well as hosts Colombia, in this summer's World Youth Cup – there was something for everyone.

Of the sides eliminated in the first group phase, Bolivia were never the whipping boys they have sometimes been of late, managing a draw with Brazil in a game they might even have won. Venezuela played some good football in snatches and would have benefited from more composure in front of goal, with much the same applying to the hosts Peru. Crowd figures certainly suffered from their early elimination, but this was the most competitive Peru Under-20 side for some time.

Paraguay also crashed out, but only after parading some skilful attacking midfielders, which has not always been one of their strong points. They were eliminated after a fiery 3-3 draw with Colombia in the last group game, but the Colombians may later have regretted their qualification for the final round.

Great hopes surround this generation after Colombia reached the semi-finals of the 2009 World Under-17 Championship, but they were perhaps the most disappointing team in the tournament. In the five games of that final stage they could score only once – and that was an own goal.

Chile had few problems attacking, with their flank pair of Bryan Carrasco and Luis Felipe Gallegos particularly impressive. But their defence was poor and they were beaten to the last World Youth Cup slot by an Ecuador side that functioned collectively as well as any team in the tournament. They were tight at the back and swift on the break, with a number of players who look like they might go on to make an impression at senior level.

Although not at full strength, Argentina's performances were desperately laboured, especially bearing in mind their traditional fluency at this level. In the crunch game against Uruguay they went behind with nearly half an hour left but never looked remotely like equalising.

Off and running...Uruguay's Camilo Mayada skips past Lucas Rodriguez of Argentina

Winning that match confirmed Uruguay's return to the Olympic tournament for the first time since their gold medals of 1924 and 1928. The results were more impressive than the displays, however, and Brazil brought a sense of proportion to the Uruguayan campaign with a crushing 6-0 win in the final game with the title at stake.

Nine-goal Neymar was the outstanding player of the tournament, well supported by the likes of Lucas and Casemiro. With no World Cup qualifiers on the road to 2014, qualifying for the Olympics was especially important for Brazil and this objective was achieved in style. But some warning lights were left flashing by a 2-1 defeat by Argentina in which they lost control to inferior opponents.

After the manner in which Brazil were knocked out of the World Cup in South Africa, guarding against an emotional collapse in 2014 must be one of the priorities for senior coach Mano Menezes.

Tim Vickery

BELARUS PREMIER LEAGUE 2011

KEY DATES

Season starts April 1, 2011
Season ends November 26, 2011

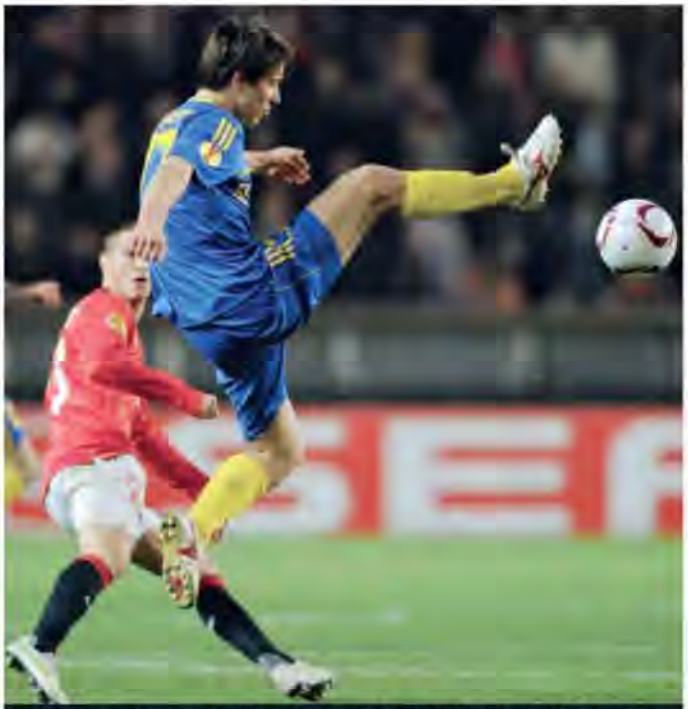
The new season promises to be one of the most competitive in years, with three clubs determined to break up BATE Borisov's domestic monopoly, which has lasted since 2006. To fulfil their ambitious plans, Shakhtyor Soligorsk, FC Minsk and Dinamo Minsk were involved in unprecedented winter transfer activity as they significantly strengthened their squads.

The most productive club were **Dinamo Minsk**. Last season, the White and Blues finished only fourth and lost their status as the most-titled club in the league when bitter rivals BATE equalled their seven league titles. Dinamo, who won the Soviet championship in 1982, have suffered a considerable slump in recent years, mainly due to constant hiring-and-firing policy of their owner, the industrial magnate Yuri Chizh.

Newly appointed 37-year-old coach Oleg Vasilenko, who was lured from Russian second-tier side Zhemchuzhina Sochi, became Chizh's 23rd recruit in his 11 years at the club. And to make his championship intentions clear, Chizh also subsided the signing of some big names.

International forward Vyacheslav Hleb, younger brother of midfielder Alexander Hleb, who is on loan at Birmingham City from Barcelona, has returned to the club from Chinese Shanghai Shenhua, 10 years after originally leaving. Gabon midfielder Bruno Mbanangoye also returned to Dinamo after a season with Turkish club Sivasspor. Among other notable new faces are Armenia striker Robert Zebelyan, who Vasilenko brought with him from Sochi, promising 24-year-old midfielder Mikhail Afanasyev from Russian third-tier club Salyut Belgorod, Belarus national team forward Leonid Kovel from dissolved Russian club Saturn and Brazilian striker Rafael Ledesma on loan from Partizan Minsk, who were relegated last season.

Back in Minsk...Vyacheslav Hleb


High stepper...newcomer Rudik will look to help BATE in their record title hunt

"Our president satisfied all my transfer appetites," says Vasilenko. "So, with a balanced and quality squad, I do not have any alternative target other than the champion's title this year."

Vladimir Kucharau, chairman of **Shakhtyor Soligorsk**, dreams of repeating the league win of 2005 this year as the Miners are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their foundation. "We achieved great progress last season by finishing second but this year I think we can throw down a challenge to BATE in the battle for the top spot," says coach Vladimir Zhuravel.

Kucharau's hopes have been helped by the retention of promising teenage defender Denis Polyakow, who has already made his debut for the national team, and the signing of experienced central defender Artem Chelyadinsky from Naftan Novopolotsk. The Miners also won a fierce battle with BATE for the signature of Under-21 forward Vladimir Yurchenko, who was on loan at Dnepr Mogilev last term, by paying him an incredible monthly salary of £25,000.

The rapidly developing **FC Minsk**, who were founded only five years ago, finished third last time out and have high hopes again this year. The loss of striker Dmitriy Osipenko, who has chosen to continue his career at Vorskla Poltava in Ukraine, won't help, but they have replaced him with the prolific Roman Vasiluk from Dinamo Brest, who has scored 181 goals in the league.

Reigning champions **BATE Borisov** have kept all their best players except experienced goalkeeper Sergey Veremko, who joined Sevastopol of Ukraine, and defender Sergey Sosnovsky, who signed for Tom Tomsk in Russia. To help continue their domestic superiority, coach Victor Goncharenko has brought in defenders Yegor Filippenko from Spartak Moscow and Serbian Marco Simic from Jagodina, plus promising midfielders Filip Rudik and Mikhail Gordiychuk from Naftan. Off the field, BATE will also rely on foreign expertise with the addition of Villarreal's physical training coach Jose Vergili and physiotherapist Daniel Irurre.

"We are not worried by the declarations of our rivals," claims BATE president Anatoliy Kapsky. "I'm sure we are the strongest side in the league.

"Our priority is to win the next title and be proclaimed as the most titled Belarus club."

Oleg Kubarev, the head coach of the promoted **Gomel**, has reinforced his squad with former BATE captain and current national team midfielder Igor Stasevich, plus experienced Belarus defender Mikalay Kashewski and Latvian defender Arturs Silagailis from Albanian side KF Tirana.

> "Our president satisfied all my transfer appetites so I don't have any alternative target other than the title"
> **Dinamo Minsk coach Oleg Vasilenko**

Experience...Dinamo Brest boss Puntus

Dinamo Brest coach Yuriy Puntus has added the experience of 32-year-old Senegalese defender Pascal Mendy to his squad of talented youngsters.

The loan signings of Dinamo Minsk midfielder Anton Matsweenka and forwards Ihar Zyankovich and Alyaksandr Lebedzew may help **Dnepr Mogilev**'s chronic financial problems, while **Naftan Novopolotsk** could struggle after a mass exodus of leading players that included Vladimir Yurchenko and Maxim Karpovich.

Belshina Bobruisk, **Torpedo Zhodino**, **Neman Grodno** and **Vitebsk** will have to work hard to stay in the league. Neman's chances are more preferable after recruiting the experienced 31-year-old holding midfielder Oleg Strakhanovich from Dinamo Minsk and forward Ivan Dzenisevich from Shakhtyor Soligorsk.

Oleg Zadernovsky

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NORWAY PREMIER LEAGUE 2011

KEY DATES

Season starts March 18, 2011

Season ends November 26, 2011

Economic realities forced Norwegian clubs to adapt to lower wages and reduced squads during pre-season.

Champions **Rosenborg**, who last season added to their impressive list of titles – 17 since 1990 – in convincing style, have struggled in the build-up. Coach Nils Arne Eggen, who returned temporarily when Erik Hamren departed last summer, has been replaced by a Swede, Janne Jonsson. A number of influential players have left, including Vadim Demidov (to Real Sociedad), Steffen Iversen (Crystal Palace), Anthony Annan (Schalke) and Roar Strand (retired), and it remains to be seen whether Jonsson will be given time to rebuild the squad. Newcomers Daniel Fredheim Holm (from Aalborg) and Jon Inge Hoiland (Stabaek) should ease the pain, but Rosenborg's 5-0 defeat by Copenhagen in a friendly showed how the gap between the two aristocrats of Scandinavian club football has increased.

Last season's runners-up **Valerenga** are certain to challenge again as coach Martin Andresen has a fine blend of experience and hungry youngsters. Defender Fredrik Stoor (Fulham) and striker Yssouf Kone (CFR Cluj) have arrived, while midfielder Kristoffer Haestad has extended his contract and will be the team's engine in midfield. He will be supplemented by creative players such as Harmeet Singh and Mohammed Fellah, and up front Luton Shelton's pace should provide good service for Kone, who replaces Viking-bound Bengt Saeternes.

Pointing the way...Molde will expect better things under their new coach Solskjaer

Tromso will be among the challengers again. However, coach Per Hogmo has lost Kayke Rodrigues and George Mourad and will have to rely on a strong defensive unit who conceded only 30 goals last season. Midfielder Serigne Kara Mbodji, 20, has been attracting a lot of interest.

Molde's main attraction is coach Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who has returned home from Manchester United. His stature and reputation are second to none and it is expected he will attract some hungry players. Magnus Wolff Eikrem (Manchester United), Davy Angan (Honefoss) and Borre Stenslid (Viking) have been signed and Solskjaer will hope to improve on last season when the club escaped relegation.

Neighbours **Aalesund** will find it hard to replace Anders Lindegaard (Manchester United), Alexander Mathisen (Lierse), Johan Arneng (Syrianska) and Tor Hogne Aaroy (JEF United in Japan), but coach Kjetil Rekdal is adamant he will develop the team further. Kjell Sellin (Rosenborg) and Jason Morrison (Stromsgodset) have been signed but the squad seems weaker than last year.

Haugesund were last season's surprise packet. It will be quite a feat for them to repeat sixth place, but coach Jostein Grindhaug has added Umaru Bangura (Honefoss) and Jose Bamberg (Norrkoping) to his already resilient squad.

Lillestrom are expected to finish higher than last year's 10th place. Strong on set-pieces and solid in defence, coach Henning Berg has been criticised for making them a duller side to watch and will have to rely on last season's squad to prove his critics wrong.

Viking and **Brann** disappointed last season and nothing but improvement will be accepted in the football crazy cities of Stavanger and Bergen. Brann seem to have the weakest and thinnest squad after parting company with Erik Huseklepp (Bari), Petter Vaagan Moen (QPR), Jan Gunnar Solli (New York Red Bulls), Eirik Bakke (Sogndal) and Cato Guntveit (retired), and coach Rune Skarsfjord will have to rebuild. Midfielder Carl-Erik Torp (Kongsvinger), local boy Fredrik Haugen and goalkeeper Piotr Leciejewski have been signed, but pre-season matches suggested that the team will need time to settle.

Coach Aage Hareide was left frustrated by Viking's inconsistency last season. Bengt Saeternes should ease the goalscoring burden on Erik Nevland but Alexander Odegaard has left to pursue his career in France with Metz.

Stabaek's new Swedish coach, Jorgen Lennartson, has a difficult task to follow in the footsteps of Jan Jonsson but positive pre-season results against Swedish and domestic opposition have shown the club might be a surprise. Haris Skenderovic and Gilles Ondo have joined an already settled squad, and supporters were relieved to see Mikkel "Mix" Diskerud settle his disagreements with the club.

Odd Grenland coach Dag Fagermo is happy to welcome back striker Frode Johnsen after a successful spell in Japan but Iceland goalkeeper Arni Gautur Arason has left for Lierse.

Mid-table **Stromsgodset** and **Start** can expect more of the same as last season's expansion to 16 clubs proved a success, even though two of the promoted clubs, Honefoss and Kongsvinger, were relegated. This year's newcomers, **Sogndal** and **Sarpsborg** will find it hard to survive but play-off winners **Fredrikstad** could make an impact.

Tarik Elyounoussi has returned to Fredrikstad from Heerenveen and coach Tom Freddy Aune has a squad ready to take revenge on their relegation a couple of seasons back. The local derbies against Sarpsborg will attract enormous interest in the county of Ostfold.

Sigurd Odegaard

> Solskjaer's status and reputation are second to none and he is expected to attract some hungry players to Molde

A handfull...Valerenga's Norway Under-21 Fellah will hope to be a title challenger again

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
LEAGUE OF IRELAND PREMIER DIVISION 2011

KEY DATES

Season starts March 4, 2011
Season ends October 28, 2011

Once again the build-up to the start of a new campaign has been dominated by news of yet more clubs in financial difficulties. Last year it was Cork City and Derry City; this time round Bohemians were on the brink, while Sporting Fingal ceased trading three weeks before the start of the new season.

Bohemians only lost the league title on goal difference to Shamrock Rovers in November, but since then the club – who were founder members of the League in 1921 – have been in free fall. Bohs' players were not paid towards the end of last year and two of them, Brian Shelley and Stuart Gray, sought a winding up order. It took delicate, last-minute negotiations by FA of Ireland staff and PFAI representatives to broker a deal which saw the players being paid and the Gypsies saved.

However, Bohs have lost nearly all of last term's squad, with former Republic of Ireland Under-21 left-back Conor Powell going to Colchester United, and Paddy Madden's sale to Carlisle United bringing in some badly needed cash. Manager Pat Fenlon, who Bohs wouldn't release to join Dundee United last year, had signed only four players by mid February and intends to promote players from the club's successful Under-20 team, saying: "We are a big club and I hope the supporters will be patient with us this year.

"They are used to winning and we want to keep winning, but it's going to be difficult. I didn't just want to bring in experienced players who are at the end of their careers. It's important we give young players a chance and see how they do."

Bohs may have survived but there was no last-minute reprieve for Sporting Fingal who were wound up. The club lost their main benefactor in developer Gerry Gannon and failed to find a new backer, and Fingal County Council eventually decided that the project they started four years ago was not worth pursuing. Fingal joined the First Division in 2008, won the FAI Cup and promotion in 2009 and also played in the Europa League.

Picture: www.inpho.ie

Last rites...Sporting Fingal were wound up after failing to find a replacement for their chief benefactor, Gerry Gannon

Champions **Shamrock Rovers** are sitting pretty right now, but of course it wasn't always so. The Hoops led a nomadic lifestyle for over 20 years following the sale of Milltown, but with their own members now running the club, and South Dublin County Council providing a new stadium at a modest rent in Tallaght, the Hoops are now the envy of every other club in the league.

> It took delicate, last-minute negotiations to broker a deal which saw Bohemians' players being paid and the club saved

Manager Michael O'Neill has retained nearly all of last season's squad and has added the highly rated Karl Sheppard from Galway United, Gary McCabe from Sligo Rovers and Ciaran Kilduff, a proven goalscorer, who rejoins the club from UCD and should form a formidable striking partnership with Scotland-born Gary Twigg. O'Neill also snapped up defender Keith Oman from Bohemians.

Formidable...Shamrock striker Twigg

With budgets being slashed at every club, the days of full-time professionals in the League of Ireland are gone, except for at Shamrock and last year's Cup winners **Sligo Rovers**. Sligo finished four points behind the two Dublin clubs last November, but beat Shamrock in the FAI Cup Final, a win which clinched the Soccer Writers' Personality of the Year award for their manager Paul Cook. The Liverpudlian hasn't lost any of last season's squad, which includes PFAI Player of the Year Richie Ryan, and he has signed keeper Brendan Clarke from Sporting Fingal to compete with Cup Final spot-kick hero Ciaran Kelly.

Dundalk, who showed a massive improvement under Ian Foster last season, seem set to continue that trend this year. Among the players who have moved to Oriel Park are former Bohemians strikers Jason Byrne and Mark Quigley.

Pete Mahon, manager of **St Patrick's Athletic** went back to his old club UCD to sign the McMillan brothers, David and Evan, but the Saints have lost Ryan Guy, one of their most popular players in recent seasons. California-born Guy has returned to the US and is hoping to join an MLS club.

UCD have produced some excellent players and while the students have lost a few of their better performers, they will bring in four scholarship players.

After a successful appeal to the Independent Club Licencing Committee, **Galway United** did eventually get a Premier Division licence. Initially unable to provide a tax clearance certificate, they were only awarded an "A championship" licence, which would have meant dropping to a division lower than the other two Galway clubs, Mervue United and Salthill Devon. Clearly, there is not enough support for three clubs in a city like Galway. Manager Sean Connor, who saw most of last season's squad leave, including Seamus Conneely, who joined Sheffield United, has little time to assemble a new squad.

Most neutrals will welcome the return of **Derry City**, who are based in Northern Ireland, to the top flight. Stephen Kenny is a shrewd manager and the Candystripes will hopefully have learnt from the irregularities which saw them demoted at the end of the 2009 season.

Drogheda United had planned to field an all-amateur team this term, before learning they were being promoted to take Sporting Fingal's place in the Premier Division. Manager Bobby Browne may have to bring in a few experienced players if The Drogs are to survive in the top flight. Because of their financial situation Drogheda will be one of the favourites for relegation and, despite some shock results last season, **Bray Wanderers** are also among the clubs likely to go down. However, much could depend on the vastly experienced Pat Devlin staying on as manager.

Sean Creedon

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RUSSIA PREMIER LEAGUE 2011-12

KEY DATES

Season starts March 12, 2011
Season ends Spring 2012

Ruud Gullit and Roberto Carlos were the stars of the pre-season rush for new signings, joining **Terek** and **Anzhi** respectively in a bid to attract more public attention to the two teams based in Russia's deep southern areas.

Dutchman Gullit, 48, has been appointed coach of Chechnya-based Terek until the end of this transitional championship, after which the 2012-13 season will run from autumn to spring as the football calendar synchronises with the rest of Europe.

Roberto Carlos, the charismatic 37-year-old Brazilian, has signed a two-and-a-half year contract with Anzhi in Dagestan after leaving Corinthians, despite offers from Flamengo and Palmeiras in his homeland, as well as approaches from clubs in the Middle East, USA and Australia.

While Gullit and Roberto Carlos have been described as "perestroika-season signings", it is another transfer that has caused the biggest response among fans.

Andrey Tikhonov, who, at 40, is probably the most famous **Spartak Moscow** player of the 1990s, rejoined the red-and-whites as assistant coach to his former midfield partner Valery Karpin. Having won eight national titles with the club, Tikhonov left after a conflict with coach Oleg Romantsev at the turn of the century and played for a number of other clubs, playing his final season with lower division Khimki. It is even possible the fans' favourite will make one final appearance for Spartak at Moscow's Luzhniki stadium before he starts his coaching work.

Welcome to Chechnya...Gullit (centre) meets club officials on arriving in Grozny to begin his tenure as coach of local side Terek

Veteran...Tikhonov is back at Spartak

Spartak, who have also tried to re-sign Tottenham Hotspur striker Roman Pavlyuchenko, are seen as one of the new season's leading contenders, alongside Zenit, CSKA, Rubin, Lokomotiv and Dynamo.

Zenit, the 2010 champions, who enjoy multimillion dollar support from Russia's biggest national corporation Gazprom, will start another campaign under the guidance of Luciano Spalletti who, in his first season, impressed by overseeing a 23-game unbeaten run and then, as a gesture of solidarity with the fans, pulled off his shirt during victory celebrations in freezing temperatures.

CSKA needed no major signings after last year's impressive transfer campaign. Their Brazilian-Ivorian pairing of Vagner Love and Seydou Doumbia is the league's most impressive attacking partnership. A good choice of midfielders, including Japan's Keisuke Honda and Chile winger Mark Gonzalez, means that the Moscow "army" team coach Leonid Slutsky often omits players such as Alan Dzagoev, the young favourite of national coach Dick Advocaat.

Rubin, surprise winners of successive championships in 2008 and 2009, will try to improve on their third place last year. Impressed by their Ecuadorian captain and long-time playmaker Christian Noboa, Rubin's owners have signed Noboa's compatriot, 18-year-old Walter Chala, on a four-year contract. He will be needed to increase an attacking threat which looked insufficient compared with the strong defence enjoyed by coach Kurban Berdyev in last season's Champions League.

> Tikhonov, the most famous Spartak player of the 1990s, has rejoined as assistant to his former midfield partner Valery Karpin

Igor Lebedenko, formerly with Rostov, and Vladimir Dyadyun from Spartak Nalchik have been added to a group of forwards that is now missing Sergei Kornilenko, who moved to Blackpool in England.

Midfield choice...CSKA's Honda

In attack **Dynamo** will rely on last year's signing Kevin Kuranyi. The Germany star, who says he has no problems living and playing in a new country, will surely be the one to watch. With nine goals in 16 games he became the team's top scorer last year.

Moscow rivals **Lokomotiv** have replaced Yuri Semin with Yuri Krasnozhan, who guided **Spartak Nalchik** to a best-ever sixth spot last season and is considered a possible future national coach.

When Saturn announced their withdrawal from the Premier League due to financial problems, **Krasnodar** joined neighbours **Kuban** in the top division along with **Volga**. Last year's lower-division champions, Kuban looked impressive under the guidance of Romanian Dan Petrescu but they and the other two face a serious survival battle along with **Amkar**, **Krylia Sovetov**, **Rostov** and **Tom**.

After the 16 teams have played each other twice, they will be split into two groups of eight; the first playing for the title and Europe, the second vying to avoid relegation.

Victor Gusev

SWEDEN ALLSVENSKAN 2011

KEY DATES

Season starts April 2, 2011
Season ends October 23, 2011

The absence of Swedish clubs from the Champions League for over a decade - Helsingborgs were the last across the threshold back in 2000-01 - may not be the stuff of a Swedish league press release, but if, as a fan, you want a championship which is utterly unpredictable and not in thrall to platinum-card cartels, the Allsvenskan has to be for you.

Fittingly for a country which prides itself on its egalitarian society, no fewer than nine different clubs have struck gold in the past 12 years and this term, the 87th in the league's history, at least half a dozen will think, without a flicker of self-delusion, that they have a genuine chance of the title.

Reigning champions **Malmo** are, by common consent, the favourites – which is a natural state of affairs given the stylish, attacking football they produced last term and the retention of all their key players. However, coach Roland Nilsson and his side will have to tread carefully. Djurgardens from Stockholm are the only team to have successfully defended an Allsvenskan crown this millennium and Malmo's decision not to make any new signings may rebound on them. Much will depend on whether they can pull up the drawbridge during the August transfer window. Their trio of attacking-third starlets – Jiloan Ahmed, Guillermo Molins and top scorer Agon Mehmeti – are all generating much overseas interest and if any of them effected a mid-season breakout the consequences could be dire.

Elfsborg, fourth in 2010, should once again be serious title contenders, though they do, as a matter of urgency, need to discover a killer instinct. Still hugely reliant on the craft and experience of international stars Stefan Ishizaki and Anders Svensson, the Boras club suffered a major blow in January when leading marksman Denni Avdic left for Werder Bremen. However, they hope they have filled the gap with the acquisition of David Elm from Fulham and ex-Vitesse Arnhem forward Lasse Nilsson.

After cutting the figure of champions-elect for much of last season, before fading at the death and having to make do with the runners-up spot, **Helsingborgs** will set their sights as high as possible. A strike force featuring Alexander Gerndt – the league's top scorer in 2010 with 20 goals – and Rasmus Jonsson is arguably the best in the country, while good things are expected from teenage midfielder Simon Thern, son of ex-Sweden schemer Jonas Thern.

Driving on...Elfsborg will need the inspiration of midfielder Ishizaki (left)

The only Swedish club to claim a European trophy (the UEFA Cup in 1982 and 1987), **IFK Gothenburg** are rightly considered a domestic institution. But greater consistency is a must if they are to improve on last season's seventh-place finish. IFK fans were left underwhelmed by the club's recent forays into the market for attacker Andreas Drugge from Trelleborgs and Faroese full-back Hjortur Valgardsson, but the Angels could quite easily find themselves among the pacesetters. Their defence is sound, Tobias Hysen and Robin Soder are both fine marksmen, and in attacking all-rounder Niklas Barkroth, they boast a teenager of huge potential.

Last term's overachievers Orebro, Trelleborgs and Mjallby – who finished third, fifth and sixth respectively – all have good reason to believe the party can go on. Finnish coach Sixten Bostrom has forged **Orebro** into a highly efficient and resourceful unit who can entertain as well, and even with the recent departures of Brazilian striker Paulinho, to Stockholm second division side Hammarby, and midfielder Roni Porokora, to Germinal Beerschot in Belgium, it is hard to imagine this tight-knit group falling back. Hannover's Kosovan winger Valdet Rama is a solid recruit, while the off-season's best news was Sweden midfielder Nordin Gerzic's decision to remain on board.

> IFK Gothenburg are rightly considered an institution – but greater consistency is a must if they are to improve on last season

Great potential...IFK striker Barkroth

Last season, **Mjallby**, in their first campaign in the top flight for 25 years, took virtually everyone by surprise with their gutsy approach, enterprising football and capacity for bargain buys. Provided they can retain their two best players, Dutch striker Mostapha El Kabir and Kenyan holding midfielder Patrick Osiako, they can stay competitive.

As for **Trelleborgs**, with only one real star in brilliant young keeper Viktor Noring, the work ethic and discipline instilled in the team by old coaching sweat Tom Prahl should continue to pay dividends.

Interesting times for Stockholm's Allsvenskan's representatives. From national champions in 2009 to a close scrape with relegation last term, **AIK** need time to rebuild and to this end have appointed a new coach in Andreas Alm and brought in Sierra Leone striker Teteh Bangura from lower league side Koping and winger Martin Mutumba, who returns to the club after a spell in Hungary with Videoton.

Djurgarden, the capital's other elite side, have a three year-plan to go from relegation candidates to the upper reaches of the table, but a lack of depth could see them on a never-ending loop in mid-table. Their one sliver of hope comes from Nigerian striker Kennedy Igboananike. Champions in 2008, low-key **Hacken** work religiously to a shoestring budget and would be delighted to carry on holding in the belly of the league.

A season free from relegation worries is also the ultimate aim of Kalmar and Halmstads, with each taking their own original route to the comfort zone. East coast **Kalmar** have prospected for talent in Kosovo, while **Halmstads** have gone Spanish, bringing in the former Malmo assistant Pep Clotet Ruiz as coach and a clutch of loanees from Real Madrid's reserve side, Castilla.

Both promoted sides seem on the right lines for survival. **Syrianska** have made several judicious buys, particularly Djurgarden midfielder Sharbel Touma, while **Norrkoping** have beefed up their ranks with the arrival of attacker Astrit Ajdarevic from Orebro and full-back Mathias Floren from Elfsborg.

GAIS from Gothenburg and **Gefle** may need a miracle not to fall through the autumn trapdoor.

Nick Bidwell

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USA MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER 2011

KEY DATES

Season starts March 15, 2011

Season ends October 23, 2011

"Steady progress"; those seem to be the words that Major League Soccer lives by.

This season MLS will have 18 teams – the same as Germany's Bundesliga – and the organisational, financial and marketing stability of the league have been improving. But while the calibre of football on offer has certainly made some progress, MLS is caught in a trap of its own making, with the fiscal caution that has kept the league going and has attracted the attention of investors also making it extremely difficult for clubs to attract top players.

The strict salary cap means MLS sides cannot hope to compete with the wages on offer in Europe, and this limiting factor was acknowledged in 2007 with the introduction of the "Designated Player" scheme, which allowed each club to sign up to three players who could be paid outside the salary cap. However, as the 2011 season approaches, it's worth noting that only one new DP has been signed: the Mexican striker Omar Bravo, who has joined Sporting Kansas City.

Now, it seems, instead of bringing in DPs, MLS clubs have joined what is undoubtedly a worldwide trend for bringing through home-grown players.

MLS clubs are being encouraged to run their own youth academies and the process by which the products of these academies can be signed as professionals has been simplified. The scheme is already showing signs of success, with virtually every club now reporting at least one academy product in their squad.

The scheme does, however, have its drawbacks. For a start, it upsets many of the long-established youth clubs who cannot now compete with the MLS academies who are offering superior facilities.

There is also the worry that if the MLS academies do produce star players they will have virtually no chance of hanging on to them long term due to the salary cap limitations. There are already enough young Americans with European clubs to make this point crystal clear.

Overall, the academies will, no doubt, eventually bring about an improvement in the level of MLS play, but it is unlikely to be dramatic – and it will not be happening any time soon.

For a quick fix, a quick raising of the playing standards, MLS needs to bring in good, young – or even not-so-young – foreign players who have not yet been picked up by the Europeans.

Of course, there are such players, plenty of them, but identifying them needs a knowledgeable, sophisticated and extensive scouting

Star turn...Bravo, who has arrived from Guadalajara of Mexico, is the sole DP so far

The future...Seattle's promising young Colombian

SIGNIFICANT INS AND OUTS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

CHICAGO FIRE
Arrivals Diego Chavez (Nacional, Uru), Cory Gibbs (New England), Gaston Puerari (Wanderers, Uru).
Departures Nery Castillo (loan finished), Wilman Conde (Atlas, Mex), Freddy Ljungberg (Celtic, Sco), Brian McBride (retired).

COLUMBUS CREW
Arrival Jeff Cunningham (Dallas).
Departures Brian Carroll (Philadelphia Union), Frankie Hejduck (Los Angeles Galaxy).

DC UNITED
Arrivals Rodrigo Brasesco (Racing, Uru), Charlie Davies (Sochaux, Fra), Fred (New England), Dax McCarty (Dallas), Pat Onstad (Houston Dynamo), Josh Wolff (Kansas City).
Departures Pablo Hernandez (loan finished), Jaime Moreno (released), Juan Manuel Pena (released).

HOUSTON DYNAMO
Arrival Jermaine Taylor (St George's, Jam).
Departures Richard Mulrooney (released), Pat Onstad (DC United).

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION
Arrivals Ousmane Dabo (unattached), Didier Domi (Olympiakos, Gre).
Departures Fred (DC United), Cory Gibbs (Chicago), Taylor Twellman (retired).

Chicago bound...Gibbs

New York new boy...Rogers

NEW YORK RED BULLS
Arrivals Luke Rodgers (Notts County, Eng), Jan Gunnar Solli (Brann, Nor).
Departures Juan Pablo Angel (Los Angeles), Andrew Boyens (Chivas USA).

PHILADELPHIA UNION
Arrivals Brian Carroll (Columbus), Faryd Mondragon (Koln, Ger), Carlos Ruiz (Aris, Gre), Carlos Valdes (Sante Fe, Col).
Departure Alejandro Moreno (Chivas USA).

SPORTING KANSAS CITY
Arrival Omar Bravo (Guadalajara, Mex).
Departures Jimmy Conrad (Chivas USA), Josh Wolff (Kansas City).

TORONTO
Arrivals none.
Departure Joseph Nane (Colorado).

forward Montero (right) takes on Mariano Trujillo (left) and Jesus Padilla of Chivas USA

system – particularly in some of the less likely areas of Central and South America.

Every so often an MLS team comes up with a real gem; two examples of which are Fredy Montero, a Colombian forward signed at the age of 21 by Seattle coach Sigi Schmid, and David Ferreira, a Colombian midfielder aged 31, signed by Dallas coach Schellas Hyndman. However, much of the evidence suggests that MLS scouting, beyond the standard European contacts and dealing with agents, remains a hit-and-miss affair.

As MLS enters the post-Beckham era – it hardly matters that he still has a season to go, not when he has been dithering about in London, apparently doing everything to delay his return to Los Angeles – it can be justifiably satisfied with that "steady progress" motif.

A lesson will have been learned with David Beckham, and one suspects that future DPs will have to give greater evidence of commitment. Most likely, MLS has discovered what the Italians knew decades ago: if you're going to shell out a lot of money on imports, concentrate on the goalscorers!

In addition to seeing what the academy systems will uncover in 2011, there are two new clubs to cast an eye over in MLS: Portland Timbers and Vancouver Whitecaps. Both are showing the same extraordinary fan enthusiasm as their neighbour Seattle, with Vancouver having sold 16,000 season tickets and Portland capping their sales at 12,000.

LA deal...Beckham has one year left

While there's still a way to go to catch up with Seattle, who last season averaged over 36,000 fans per game – over 50 per cent more than their nearest rivals, Los Angeles Galaxy – those figures suggest that the north west is going to capture the attention as pro soccer's newest hotbed.

Paul Gardner

Newcomers Vancouver Whitecaps have sold 16,000 season tickets, while Portland Timbers have capped their sales at 12,000

WESTERN CONFERENCE

CHIVAS USA
Arrivals Andrew Boyens (New York), Jimmy Conrad (Kansas City), Simon Elliott (Wellington Pheonix, Aus), Alejandro Moreno (Philadelphia), Heath Pearce (Dallas).
Departure Jonathan Bornstein (Tigres, Mex).

COLORADO RAPIDS
Arrivals Joseph Nane (Toronto), Tyrone Marshall (Seattle).
Departure Claudio Lopez (released).

DALLAS
Arrivals none
Departures Dax McCarty (DC United), Heath Pearce (Chivas USA).

LOS ANGELES GALAXY
Arrivals Juan Pablo Angel (New York), Paolo Cardozo (Quilmes, Arg).
Departures Edson Buddle (Ingolstadt, Ger), Dema Kovalenko (retired), Eddie Lewis (retired).

Star man...Angel joins Galaxy

Back home...US striker Cooper

PORTLAND TIMBERS
Arrival Kenny Cooper (1860 Munich, Ger).
Departures none.

REAL SALT LAKE
Arrival Arturo Alvarez (San Jose).
Departure Robbie Findley (Nottingham Forest, Eng).

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES
Arrivals none.
Departures Arturo Alvarez (Real Salt Lake), Eduardo (unattached), Geovanni (Vitoria, Bra), Cornell Glen (unattached).

SEATTLE SOUNDERS
Arrival Erik Friberg (Hacken, Swe).
Departures Tyrone Marshall (Colorado), Peter Vagenas (released).

VANCOUVER WHITECAPS
Arrival Alain Rochat (Zurich, Swi).
Departures none.

Swiss recruit...defender Rochat

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ASIA 2011 AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

KEY DATES

Round of 16 May 24-25, 2011
Quarter-finals September 14, 2011 & September 27-28, 2011
Semi-finals October 19, 2011 & October 26, 2011
Final November 4 or 5, 2011

A new champion is the only thing guaranteed in the 2011 edition of the Asian Champions League as holders Seongnam Ilhwa will not be represented in the continental championship despite winning the title in November.

Even the venue for this year's Final remains an uncertainty, with the Asian Football Confederation deciding that one of the finalists will stage the one-off match after two years of Tokyo hosting the finale proved too ambitious a move for the club game in the region.

With the defending champions not granted an automatic berth in the following year's competition, Seongnam miss out this time after failing to win the South Korean Cup or finish in the top three in the K-League play-offs.

That has prompted a sell-off by the two-time Asian champions of some of the club's best talent, with several of their compatriots hoping to benefit as the nation aims to retain its grip on the title.

Seongnam were the second successive South Korean club to win the title, following Pohang Steelers' success in 2009, but the focus shifts this time around to Korean champions Seoul and Cup winners Suwon Bluewings.

The top two teams in each of the eight groups goes into the round of 16 and **Seoul** will be among the favourites to progress a year after all four South Korean participants made it to the quarter-finals.

Former international midfielder Hwangbo Kwan has been lured back to South Korea from Japan's Oita Trinita to coach the team following Nelo Vingada's exit at the end of last season and the club have made Uzbekistan midfielder Server Djeparov a permanent signing after a loan spell last year.

Also joining the club is Colombian midfielder Mauricio Molina, who was instrumental in Seongnam's success last season.

South Korea's success in the last two tournaments came after two years of joy for the Japanese, and Seoul will take on current J.League champions **Nagoya Grampus** in Group F, alongside China's **Hangzhou Greentown** and former winners **Al Ain** of the UAE, who join the east Asian trio after defeating Indonesia's Sriwijaya in a play-off in February.

The Samsung-backed **Suwon Bluewings** have spent heavily, snapping up national goalkeeper Jung Sung-ryong from Seongnam to replace Lee Woon-jae between the posts.

International striker Choi Sung-gook made the same journey and Lee Yong-rae, who impressed during the Asian Cup, has been signed from Gyeongnam.

We'll meet again...Bunyodkor's Viktor Karpenko (centre) will face Al Ittihad once more

Bundesliga side Wolfsburg after his displays at the Asian Cup in Qatar, where he finished as the tournament's top scorer.

The AFC Champions League presents the western half of the continent with an opportunity to erase some of the painful memories of those Asian Cup finals, at which none of the region's teams were capable of progressing to the semi-final stage. However, it is more than five years since a team from that part of Asia has won this title.

Al Ittihad, who won the second of their back-to-back titles in 2005, will be hoping to put an end to that statistic and the Saudi giants face **Al Wahda** of the United Arab Emirates, Iranian side **Persepolis** and Uzbekistan's **Bunyodkor** in Group C.

The chances of Bunyodkor winning a title that has always eluded them – despite the huge sums spent on coaches such as Luiz Felipe Scolari and Zico, as well as former World Cup winner Rivaldo – have receded with the club's financial decline. But despite the loss of most of their expensively acquired foreign talent, Mirdjalal Kasimov's side won the domestic double last year and will harbour serious hopes of reaching the next stage in this competition.

Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia will hope to progress from Group A ahead of Qatar's **Al Gharafa**, **Al Jazira** from the UAE and **Sepahan** of Iran.

Iran's **Zob Ahan**, who were the beaten finalists last year, have set their sights on going one better and Mansour Ebrahimzadeh's team meet Qatar's **Al Rayyan**, **Al Shabab** from Saudi Arabia and UAE's **Emirates Club** in Group D.

Saudi side **Al Nassr** face Qatari club **Al Sadd**, **Esteghlal** of Iran and Uzbekistan's **Pakhtakor** in Group B.

In Group G, Japan's **Cerezo Osaka** face **Arema** of Indonesia, South Korean's **Jeonbuk Motors** and **Shandong Luneng** of China.

Michael Church

Seongnam's failure to qualify prompted a sell-off by the reigning champions, with several of their compatriots benefitting

They join a squad that is one of the strongest in Asia despite being trimmed of such talents as China defender Li Weifeng, who has returned home to play for Tianjin Teda, and Japan's Naohiro Takahara, who has gone to Shimizu S-Pulse.

Suwon's task of progressing to the knockout phase will be hard after being drawn in Group H alongside **Shanghai Shenhua** of China, Japan's **Kashima Antlers**, who are desperate to make up for a series of disappointing showings in the competition in recent years, and **Sydney** of Australia.

Gamba Osaka were the last Japanese club to win the title, defeating Adelaide United in 2007, and Akira Nishino's team return once again, drawn in Group E alongside **Tianjin Teda**, Australia's **Melbourne Victory** and a **Jeju United** side that impressed in the K-League last season as they finished runners-up.

Jeju have, however, lost their irrepressible midfielder Koo Ja-cheol, who signed for

Hopeful...Nagoya's Keiji Tamada (left)

New No1...Suwon's Jung Sung-ryong

JAPAN J.LEAGUE 2011

KEY DATES

Season starts March 5, 2011
Summer break June 27, 2011 to July 26, 2011
Season ends December 3, 2011

Nagoya Grampus, defending champions for the first time, have seen coach Dragan Stojkovic strengthen his side with the acquisition of Jungo Fujimoto, scorer of 13 goals for Shimizu S-Pulse last season, and another Japan squad member, centre-forward Kensuke Nagai from Vissel Kobe. Key holding midfielder Danilson broke his right leg in February and will be sidelined until the summer, but Grampus will still start out as the team to beat.

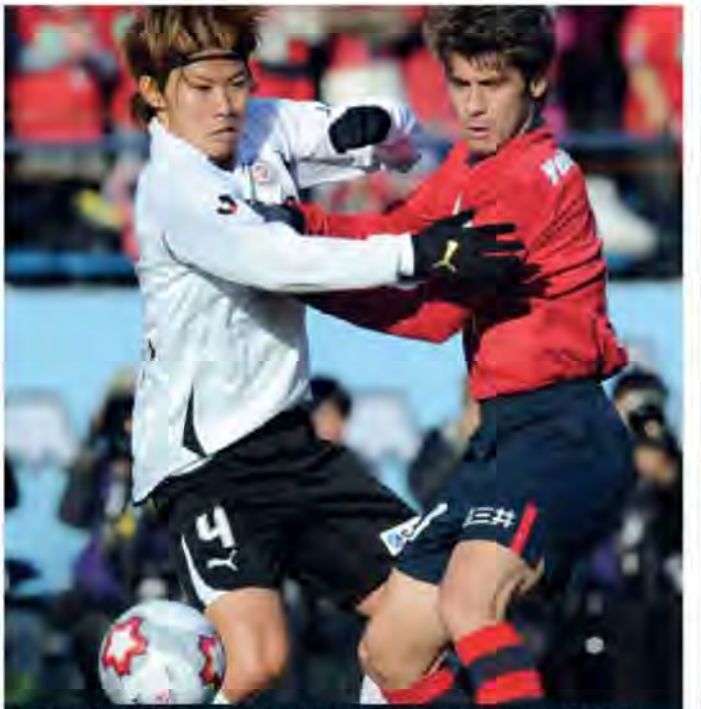
Gamba Osaka have brought in versatile forward Kim Seung-yong from Jeonbuk Motors and striker Adriano from Cerezo Osaka. Michihiro Yasuda and Lucas have both gone, to Vitesse in Holland and Brazil's Atletico Paranaense respectively, but if Shoki Hirai and Takashi Usami are on form up front again they must fancy their chances.

Cerezo Osaka, starting a second season back in the top flight, have lost key talent and may struggle to keep the momentum going with the Champions League to handle as well. Adriano has gone to Gamba and creative force Akihiro Ienaga has joined Spain's Mallorca, but midfielder Kim Bo-kyung, now an established South Korea international, returns from a loan at Oita Trinita a much-improved player.

Kashima Antlers, whose three-year run as champions was ended by Nagoya, have drafted in Carlao from Portugal's Uniao de Leiria to replace Marquinhos and Japan midfielder Takuya Honda arrives from Shimizu. At the back, Daiki Iwamasa and Masahiko Inoha shone at the Asian Cup. Kashima won the Emperor's Cup in January and it could be their year again.

Kawasaki Frontale's new coach Naoki Soma talks of winning the league but the departure of Hiroyuki Taniguchi, Vitor Junior, Satoru Yamagishi and Yusuke Mori is hardly balanced by the signings of Koji Yamase and Yusuke Tanaka, and much still rests on the veteran shoulders of Juninho, Kengo Nakamura and Junichi Inamoto.

Shimizu S-Pulse are at risk of free fall. Their new coach is Afshin Ghotbi, who led Iran at the Asian Cup, but most of the team have gone, including forwards Shinji Okazaki, Jungo Fujimoto and Frode Johnsen, midfielders Takuya Honda, Akihiro Hyodo and Teruyoshi Ito, and defenders Naoaki Aoyama and Daisuke Ichikawa. Shinji Ono is the new captain and Alex Brosque, Daigo Kobayashi and Naohiro Takahara have come in, but a difficult season is on the cards.


Collision...Kashima's Fellype Gabriel (right) and Shimizu defender Kosuke Ota clash

Sanfrecce Hiroshima suffered a run of injuries and a fixture overload last season but they should spring back with an attack spearheaded by Hisato Sato and Tadanari Lee. The departure of national team defender Tomoaki Makino and Bulgarian centre-back Ilian Stoyanov is largely covered by the acquisition of Satoru Yamagishi and Hiroki Mizumoto.

Shunsuke Nakamura is the new captain after a radical shake-up at **Yokohama F-Marinos**. Naoki Matsuda, Koji Yamase, Ryuji Kawai, Daisuke Sakata and Norihisa Shimizu have gone, and in come defenders Naoaki Aoyama and Yuzo Kobayashi, plus midfielder Hiroyuki Taniguchi. Teenage striker Yuji Ono made an impact last year but the attack still looks thin.

Albirex Niigata, still reeling from the loss of Kisho Yano to Germany's Freiburg, may struggle to match last year's form after also losing chief architect Marcio Richardes and defender Mitsuru Nagata, both to Urawa Reds. Cho Young-cheol and Gotoku Saka will give them energy out wide but much will be required from Brazilian signings Joao Paulo and Bruno Lopes.

Urawa Reds, looking to bounce back after slipping to their lowest finish since 2002 last season, have re-appointed Zeljko Petrovic as manager following his stint as assistant at West Ham United. The arrival of Marcio Richardes should enliven the attack, as may young striker Mazzolla, and Mitsuru Nagata is a good signing in defence, but Reds will miss Hajime Hosogai.

Jubilo Iwata's Ryoichi Maeda is keen to finish as the J.League's top scorer for a third year in a row. The return of Yuichi Komano from injury should also help Jubilo improve on their 2010 displays. However, veteran midfielder Norihiro Nishi is out with a torn Achilles tendon.

Omiya Ardija should be safe with their quality up front and they have shored up the defence with veterans Shusuke Tsubouchi from Vissel Kobe, Daigo Watanabe from Kyoto Sanga and Kim Young-gwon from Tokyo.

Montedio Yamagata have lost Chikashi Masuda and Yuzo Tashiro to Kashima but two more Antlers, Yuji Funayama and Daichi Kawashima, have come north, and with Brazilians Hugo and Maicon, and Japan-born Egyptian Osama Elsamni, coach Shinji Kobayashi is expected to keep them up again.

Vegalta Sendai had a roller-coaster ride in 2010 on their return to the top flight but with a little more consistency should stay up again. Fernandinho and Park Sung-ho have gone, but veteran Brazilian striker Marquinhos arrives from Kashima along with Atsushi Yanagisawa from Kyoto.

Vissel Kobe will hope Yoshito Okubo has put his injuries behind him and teenage forward Keijiro Ogawa should keep on getting better. Not many ins and outs at a club that may finally have started to believe in itself.

> Cerezo Osaka have lost key talent and may struggle to keep momentum going with the Champions League to handle as well

Up for title defence...coach Stojkovic

Kashiwa Reysol, the second division champions, have drafted in Tatsuya Masushima, Jorge Wagner, Alceu, Akihiro Hyodo and An Yong-hak, who played for North Korea at the World Cup. Coach Nelsinho is surely aiming high.

Ventforet Kofu have replaced coach Kazuo Uchida, who took them up, with Toshiya Miura, who nearly led Kobe down. Meanwhile, Paulinho and Mike Havenaar, who was the top scorer in the second division last year, could do well in the higher division.

Former **Avispa Fukuoka** player Yoshiyuki Shinoda, promoted in his fourth year in charge, has brought in experience in Makoto Tanaka, Sho Naruoka and Takuya Matsuura from Jubilo, but could struggle.

Mike Plastow

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SOUTH KOREA K-LEAGUE 2011

KEY DATES

Season starts March 5, 2011
Season ends December 4, 2011

The trapdoor at the foot of the K-League will be opened this year, with the 15-club National League feeding its best sides into the top-flight for the first time.

Concerns of relegation, however, are unlikely to worry defending league champions and play-off winners **Seoul**, who are favourites to triumph again – despite the inexperienced Hwangbo Kwan replacing Portuguese coach Nelo Vingada. The pick of their new purchases for this term is former Colombia international Mauricio Molina, who arrives from **Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma**.

Pressure...Seongnam's Kim Sung-hwan

The loss of star man Molina is a blow for Seongnam – as was their failure to reach this year's Asian Champions League in order to defend their title. As the country's most successful side, Seongnam should be riding high in the list of title contenders, but their struggles in last year's league campaign raise doubts about their credentials.

South coasters **Busan I'Park** are one of the league's most successful outfits with four championships, but a lowly eighth place last season led to the installation of new coach Ahn Ik-soo, who was previously assistant at Seoul. He began his reign by reinforcing the defence with the signing of Dutchman Bas Van den Brink and Australian Iain Fyfe, and they are a good bet for the play-offs.

Backed by the financial muscle of Samsung Electronics, **Suwon Bluewings** had a disappointing season last time out. As a result, they spent heavily in the summer, with the pick of their acquisitions being the country's top goalkeeper, Jung Sung-ryong, from Seongnam.

Expectations....huge financial backing means Hwang Jae-won and Suwon Bluewings must get back to winning ways this year

At the opposite end of the scale to the financial might of conglomerate-owned clubs like Seoul and Suwon are the less financially powerful outfit such as civic-run **Gwangju**.

Based in the country's fifth-largest metropolis, fans in the south-west corner of the Korean peninsula have come together with the local government to set up a new club this season. A city famous for its association with the student protests of 1980 that sparked a massacre, Gwangju's most recent flirtation with top-class football was through the South Korean military team. For the purposes of their time in the city, the side were known as Gwangju Sangmu, but were always among the league's whipping boys.

The new club's aspirations would appear to be rather limited, with coach Choi Man-hee admitting: "I have to learn about the players and how they play before I can be sure of what style will suit them as a unit."

For a barometer of how hard clubs backed by communities can find life in the K-League, Gwangju need look no further than another recently established club, **Gangwon**.

Brought to life in time for the 2009 season, Gangwon finished 13th and 12th in their first two seasons in the then 15-team table and their third season of existence could be another year of struggle.

Having relocated to Sangju, the military side, now known as **Sangju Sangmu**, will be made up of players carrying out their two-year national service. A team of relative youth and inexperience, they tend to struggle, although this time they will be boosted by the arrival of two players from Seoul: Kim Chi-woo, who played at the 2010 World Cup, and Choi Hyo-jin.

> At the opposite end of the scale to the might of conglomerate-owned clubs like Seoul and Suwon are civic-run Gwangju

Former national team coach Huh Jung-moo will have high hopes for his first full season in charge at the port city side of **Incheon United**, while last season's play-off entrants **Ulsan** appear to mean business this time around, securing a clutch of Korean stalwarts, such as former Fulham striker Seol Ki-hyeon.

Incheon boss...ex-national coach Huh

Having picked up Luke DeVere from A-League club Brisbane Roar and Colombian forward Mauricio Mendoza, **Gyeongnam** will fancy their chances of the play-offs.

Pohang Steelers fell on hard times last season, after a 2009 Champions League title and the K-League championship in 2007. Brazilian striker Adrian Chuva, signed from Chunnam Dragons, should bolster their attack as coach Hwang Sun-hong takes over after three years with Busan I'Park.

With little transfer activity, **Jeonbuk Motors** will shape up pretty much as they ended the last campaign and, as they often have been in recent years, they should do well again, along with **Jeju United** who, as unfancied outsiders, finished second in the table last year. However, a gruelling Asian Champions League and the loss of midfielder Koo Ja-cheol to Wolfsburg could be problematic.

Last season's bottom side **Daegu**, look set to struggle again, as do **Daejeon Citizen** and **Chunnam Dragons**, for whom veteran keeper Lee Woon-jae from Suwon could be in for a busy season.

Bryan Kay

ESM TEAM OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2011

European Sports Media

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group vote for their first XI from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted this month, visit www.worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Victor Valdes (Barcelona)	12
Petr Cech (Chelsea)	7
Roman Weidenfeller (B Dortmund)	7
Iker Casillas (Real Madrid)	6
Manuel Neuer (Schalke)	4
Edwin Van der Sar (Man United)	4
Steeve Elana (Brest)	3
Heurelho Gomes (Tottenham H)	2
Thomas Kraft (Bayern Munich)	2
Steve Mandanda (Marseille)	2
Fernando Muslera (Lazio)	2
Maarten Stekelenburg (Ajax)	2
Rene Adler (Leverkusen)	1
Daniel Aranzubia (Deportivo)	1
Cesar Sanchez (Valencia)	1
David De Gea (Atletico)	1
Morgan De Sanctis (Napoli)	1
Craig Gordon (Sunderland)	1
Julio Cesar (Internazionale)	1
Wojciech Szczesny (Arsenal)	1

DEFENDERS

Nemanja Vidic (Man United)	24
Gareth Bale (Tottenham H)	17
Mats Hummels (B Dortmund)	17
Dani Alves (Barcelona)	13
Gerard Pique (Barcelona)	10
Carles Puyol (Barcelona)	9
Thiago Silva (Milan)	8
John Terry (Chelsea)	8
Patrice Evra (Man United)	7
Branislav Ivanovic (Chelsea)	7
Vincent Kompany (Man City)	6
Marcelo (Real Madrid)	6
Eric Abidal (Barcelona)	5
Ashley Cole (Chelsea)	5
Lucio (Internazionale)	4
Ricardo Carvalho (Real Madrid)	4
Bacary Sagna (Arsenal)	4
Neven Subotic (B Dortmund)	4
Maicon (Internazionale)	3
Nicolas Otamendi (Porto)	3
Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid)	3
Leighton Baines (Everton)	2
Giorgio Chiellini (Juventus)	2
Gael Clichy (Arsenal)	2
Benedikt Howedes (Schalke)	2
Juan (Roma)	2
Younes Kaboul (Tottenham H)	2
Stephan Lichtsteiner (Lazio)	2
Philippe Mexes (Roma)	2
Alessandro Nesta (Milan)	2
Pepe (Real Madrid)	2
Adil Rami (Lille)	2
Marcel Schmelzer (B Dortmund)	2
Javier Zanetti (Internazionale)	2
Adriano Correia (Barcelona)	1
Alex (Chelsea)	1
Alvaro Arbeloa (Real Madrid)	1
Bruno Alves (Zenit)	1
Michael Dawson (Tottenham H)	1
Mathieu Debuchy (Lille)	1
Maurizio Domizzi (Udinese)	1
Fabio Coentrao (Benfica)	1
Rio Ferdinand (Man United)	1
Christian Fuchs (Mainz)	1
Martin Kelly (Liverpool)	1
Aleksandar Kolarov (Man City)	1
Laurent Koscielny (Arsenal)	1
Kader Mangane (Rennes)	1
Zdenek Pospech (Copenhagen)	1
Rafael (Man United)	1
Andrea Ranocchia (Internazionale)	1
Victor Ruiz (Espanyol)	1
Walter Samuel (Internazionale)	1
Chris Smalling (Man United)	1
Sebastien Squillaci (Arsenal)	1
Kolo Toure (Man City)	1
Benoit Tremoulinas (Bordeaux)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Xavi (Barcelona)	23
Nuri Sahin (B Dortmund)	18
Andres Iniesta (Barcelona)	15
Samir Nasri (Arsenal)	12
Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid)	9
Nani (Man United)	8
Cesc Fabregas (Arsenal)	7
Rafael Van der Vaart (Tottenham H)	7
Lewis Holtby (Mainz)	6
Shinji Kagawa (B Dortmund)	6
Arjen Robben (Bayern Munich)	6
Alexis Sanchez (Udinese)	6
Jack Wilshere (Arsenal)	5
Florent Malouda (Chelsea)	4
Alex Song (Arsenal)	4
Michael Essien (Chelsea)	3
Hernanes (Lazio)	3
Wesley Sneijder (Internazionale)	3
Michel Bastos (Lyon)	2
Carlos Busquets (Barcelona)	2
Esteban Cambiasso (Internazionale)	2
Ryan Giggs (Man United)	2
Mario Gotze (B Dortmund)	2
Raul Meireles (Liverpool)	2
Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Javier Pastore (Palermo)	2
Xabi Alonso (Real Madrid)	2
Sven Bender (B Dortmund)	1
Angel Di Maria (Real Madrid)	1
Lassana Diarra (Real Madrid)	1
Douglas Costa (Shakhtar Donetsk)	1
Kevin Grosskreutz (B Dortmund)	1
Pablo Hernandez (Valencia)	1
Luiz Gustavo (Bayern Munich)	1
Juan Mata (Valencia)	1
Thiago Motta (Internazionale)	1
Dani Parejo (Getafe)	1
Park Ji-sung (Man United)	1
Sergio Pinto (Hannover)	1
Andrea Pirlo (Milan)	1
Bastian Schweinsteiger (B Munich)	1
David Silva (Man City)	1
Anatoliy Tymoschuk (Bayern Munich)	1
Yaya Toure (Man City)	1
Borja Valero (Villarreal)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel Messi (Barcelona)	51
Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)	20
Samuel Eto'o (Internazionale)	16
Dimitar Berbatov (Man United)	12
Edinson Cavani (Napoli)	12
Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)	12
Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)	11
Pedro (Barcelona)	11
Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)	8
Wayne Rooney (Man United)	6
Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)	5
David Villa (Barcelona)	5
Eden Hazard (Lille)	3
Nicolas Anelka (Chelsea)	2
Lucas Barrios (B Dortmund)	2
Marouane Chamakh (Arsenal)	2
Didier Drogba (Chelsea)	2
Theofanis Gekas (E Frankfurt)	2
Javier Hernandez (Man United)	2
Hulk (Porto)	2
Nilmar (Villarreal)	2
Andre Schurrle (Mainz)	2
Luis Suarez (Ajax/Liverpool)	2
Papiss Cisse (Freiburg)	1
Johan Elmander (Bolton W)	1
Kevin Gameiro (Lorient)	1
Lucho Gonzalez (Marseille)	1
Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)	1
Raul (Schalke)	1
Jose Antonio Reyes (Atletico Madrid)	1
Giuseppe Rossi (Villarreal)	1
Moussa Sow (Lille)	1
Daniel Sturridge (Bolton W)	1
Mirko Vucinic (Roma)	1

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GREECE

Aris maintain record

Aris Salonika's 0-0 draw at home to Manchester City in the Europa League means they are still yet to lose to foreign opposition at their Kleanthis Vikelidis Stadium in 25 games over more than four decades. Yiannis Mihalitsios' side still went out of the competition, losing 3-0 in the return leg.

SCOTLAND

Edu's late strike

An injury-time equaliser from Maurice Edu sent Rangers through to the last 16 of the Europa League on away goals and kept alive their hopes of completing a quadruple. The USA midfielder struck in the 92nd minute to deny Sporting Lisbon, who were leading 2-1 at home on the night and 3-2 on aggregate.

Sporting success...Edu (left)

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Leaders march on

Borac avenged their home defeat on the opening day of the season by winning 2-1 at Siroki Brijeg in the first game back after the winter break to retain their five-point lead. Srdjan Grahovac's winner 10 minutes from time keeps Vlado Jagodic's side on course for a first title.

55 goals scored by London clubs in this season's Champions League: a record for one city

RESULTS

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round

1st legs

Feb 15
Milan (Ita) 0
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng) 1 (Crouch 80)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 75,652. **Ref:** Lannoy (Fra)
Milan: Abbiati (Amelia 18) - Abate, Nesta, Yepes, Antonini, Gattuso, Thiago Silva, Flamini, Seedorf (Alexandre Pato 46), Ibrahimovic, Robinho.
Tottenham: Gomes - Corluka (Woodgate 59), Gallas, Dawson, Assou-Ekotto, Lennon, Sandro, Palacios, Pienaar (Kranjcar 76), Van der Vaart (Modric 62), Crouch.

Feb 15
Valencia (Spa) 1 (Soldado 17)
Schalke (Ger) 1 (Raul 63)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 42,703. **Ref:** Nikolaev (Rus)
Valencia: Guaita - Miguel, David Navarro, Ricardo Costa, Mathieu (Alba 78), Mehmet, Banega (Vicente 68), Tino Costa, Dominguez (Joaquin 68), Soldado, Aduriz.
Schalke: Neuer - Uchida, Howedes, Metzelder, Schmitz, Matip, Kluge, Farfan (Draxler 78), Jurado (Edu 83), Raul, Huntelaar (Hao 90).
Sent off: Schmitz 90+4min.

Feb 16
Arsenal (Eng) 2 (Van Persie 78, Arshavin 83)
Barcelona (Spa) 1 (Villa 26)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 59,927. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)
Arsenal: Szczesny - Eboue, Djourou, Koscielny, Clichy, Song (Arshavin 68), Wilshere, Walcott (Bendtner 77), Fabregas, Nasri, Van Persie.
Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Pique, Abidal, Maxwell, Xavi, Busquets, Iniesta (Adriano 89), Pedro, Messi, Villa (Keita 68).

Feb 16
Roma (Ita) 2 (Perrotta 28, Menez 61)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 3 (Jadson 29, Douglas Costa 36, Luiz Adriano 41)
HT: 1-3. **Att:** 35,873. **Ref:** Benquerenca (Por)
Roma: Doni - Cassetti, N Burdisso, Mexes, Riise (Castellini 46), Perrotta, De Rossi, Taddei, Menez, Totti, Vucinic (Borriello 68).
Shakhtar: Pyatov - Srna, Chygrynskyi, Rakytskyi, Rat, Mkhitaryan (Vitsenets 78), Hubschman, Douglas Costa (Eduardo 66), Jadson (Alex Texeira 85), Willian, Luiz Adriano.

Feb 22
Copenhagen (Den) 0
Chelsea (Eng) 2 (Anelka 17, 54)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 36,713. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)
Copenhagen: Wiland - Pospech, Jorgensen, Antonsson, Wendt (Bengtsson 75), Kvist, Claudemir, Bolanos, Gronkjaer (Zohore 87), Santin (Vingaard 46), N'Doye.
Chelsea: Cech - Bosingwa, Ivanovic, Terry, Cole, Essien, Lampard, Ramires, Malouda (Zhirkov 85), Anelka (Drogba 74), Fernando Torres (Kalou 90+2).

Feb 22
Lyon (Fra) 1 (Gomis 83)
Real Madrid (Spa) 1 (Benzema 65)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 40,299. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Lyon: Lloris - Reveillere, Cris, Lovren, Cissokho, Toulalan, Gourcuff, Kallstrom (Pjanic 77), Michel Bastos (Briand 70), Delgado (Pied 70), Gomis.
Real Madrid: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Ricardo Carvalho, Pepe, Arbeloa, Khedira (L Diarra 68), Xabi Alonso, Cristiano Ronaldo, Ozil (Marcelo 75), Di Maria, Adebayor (Benzema 64).

Feb 23
Internazionale (Ita) 0
Bayern Munich (Ger) 1 (Gomez 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 75,925. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Inter: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Ranocchia (Kharja 73), Lucio, Chivu, Zanetti, Thiago Motta, Cambiasso, Stankovic, Sneijder, Eto'o.
Bayern: Kraft - Lahm, Tymoshchuk, Badstuber, Pranjic (Breno 38), Luiz Gustavo, Schweinsteiger, Robben, Muller, Ribery, Gomez.

Feb 23
Marseille (Fra) 0
Manchester United (Eng) 0
Att: 57,957. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Marseille: Mandanda - Fanni, Diawara, Mbia, Heinze, Cisse (Cheyrou 70), Kabore, Gonzalez, Remy (Valbuena 79), Brandao, A Ayew.
Man United: Van der Sar - O'Shea, Smalling, Vidic, Evra, Carrick, Fletcher, Gibson (Scholes 73), Nani, Berbatov, Rooney.

2nd legs - March 8-16

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st knockout round

1st legs - Feb 15/17; 2nd legs - Feb 22-24
*(third-placed teams in the Champions League groups, marked *, entered at this stage)*

Anderlecht (Blg) v Ajax (Hol)*
0-3, 0-2 (agg 0-5)
Aris Salonika (Gre) v Manchester City (Eng)
0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Basle (Swi)* v Spartak Moscow (Rus)*
2-3, 1-1 (agg 3-4)
BATE Borisov (Bls) v Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
2-2, 0-0 (agg 2-2; PSG on away goals)
Benfica (Por)* v Stuttgart (Ger)
2-1, 2-0 (agg 4-1)
Besiktas (Tur) v Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr)
1-4, 0-4 (agg 1-8)
Lech Poznan (Pol) v Braga (Por)*
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Lille (Fra) v PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
2-2, 1-3 (agg 3-5)
Metalist Kharkiv (Ukr) v Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
0-4, 0-2 (agg 0-6)
Napoli (Ita) v Villarreal (Spa)
0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)
PAOK Salonika (Gre) v CSKA Moscow (Rus)
0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)
Rangers (Sco)* v Sporting Lisbon (Por)
1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3; Rangers on away goals)
Rubin Kazan (Rus)* v Twente Enschede (Hol)*
0-2, 2-2 (agg 2-4)
Sevilla (Spa) v Porto (Por)
1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2; Porto on away goals)
Sparta Prague (Cze) v Liverpool (Eng)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Young Boys (Swi) v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus)
2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4)

2nd knockout round draw

Ajax v Spartak Moscow
Bayer Leverkusen v Villarreal
Benfica v Paris Saint-Germain
CSKA Moscow v Porto
Dynamo Kyiv v Manchester City
Liverpool v Braga
PSV Eindhoven v Rangers
Twente Enschede v Zenit St Petersburg

1st legs - March 10; 2nd legs - March 17

AUSTRIA

Feb 12: Austria 1 Ried 0; Wiener Neustadt 2 Rapid 0; Sturm 2 Kapfenberger 0; LASK 0 Mattersburg 1.
Feb 13: Wacker 1 Salzburg 1.
Feb 19: Ried 2 LASK 0; Mattersburg 1 Sturm 1; Austria 4 Wiener Neustadt 0.
Feb 20: Salzburg 1 Rapid 1.
Feb 26: Wacker 2 Mattersburg 0; Wiener Neustadt 1 Salzburg 0; LASK 0 Austria 4; Rapid 2 Kapfenberger 0.
Feb 27: Sturm 1 Ried 0.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria	22	12	5	5	39	19	41
Sturm	22	12	4	6	41	20	40
Ried	22	13	1	8	32	21	40
Salzburg	22	9	8	5	24	16	35
Rapid	22	9	7	6	34	26	34
W Neustadt	22	10	4	8	28	29	34
Wacker	21	8	6	7	28	23	30
Kapfenberger	21	6	5	10	26	37	23
Mattersburg	22	4	4	14	17	38	16
LASK	22	2	4	16	14	54	10

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

BELGIUM

Regular season

Feb 2: Lokeren 2 Cercle Brugge 1; Genk 1 St Truiden 1; Charleroi 2 Germinal Beerschot 0; Mechelen 1 Kortrijk 0; Eupen 0 Zulte Waregem 2.
Feb 4: Gent 4 Lierse 1.
Feb 5: Anderlecht 2 St Truiden 0; Charleroi 2 Zulte Waregem 0; Westerlo 2 Kortrijk 1; Cercle Brugge 0 Mechelen 1.
Feb 6: Genk 1 Club Brugge 0; Germinal Beerschot 1 Lokeren 1; Eupen 0 Standard 1.
Feb 12: Mechelen 3 Westerlo 1; Club Brugge 2 Zulte Waregem 0; Anderlecht 1 Cercle Brugge 0; St Truiden 1 Eupen 1; Lokeren 1 Charleroi 1; Lierse 2 Germinal Beerschot 2.
Feb 13: Standard 0 Genk 2; Kortrijk 0 Gent 1.
Feb 15: Lierse 2 Mechelen 1.
Feb 18: Germinal Beerschot 2 Gent 2; Westerlo 1 Lokeren 2.
Feb 19: Club Brugge 2 Lokeren 1; Genk 1 Mechelen 0; Germinal Beerschot 3 Kortrijk 1; Zulte Waregem 1 Lierse 1; Charleroi 1 St Truiden 0; Eupen 0 Cercle Brugge 0.
Feb 20: Gent 4 Standard 1; Westerlo 2 Anderlecht 0.
Feb 23: St Truiden 0 Mechelen 1.
Feb 26: Standard 3 Mechelen 0.
Feb 27: St Truiden 0 Cercle Brugge 3.

BELGIUM – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Genk	27	18	6	3	62	24	60
Anderlecht	27	18	6	3	53	16	60
Gent	27	16	5	6	55	38	53
Club Brugge	27	15	3	9	54	32	48
Mechelen	27	12	7	8	30	28	43
Lokeren	27	11	10	6	38	34	43
Standard	27	13	3	11	45	36	42
Cercle Brugge	27	11	6	10	35	31	39
Kortrijk	27	10	4	13	30	33	34
Westerlo	27	9	7	11	36	38	34
Z Waregem	27	7	11	9	35	35	32
Germinal B	27	5	10	12	23	37	25
St Truiden	27	6	5	16	17	48	23
Eupen	27	5	6	16	26	46	21
Lierse	27	4	9	14	24	56	21
Charleroi	27	4	6	17	18	49	18

30-round regular season (15x2); top 6 will enter championship play-offs; 7th to 14th will enter Europa League place play-offs; bottom 2 will enter rel/prom play-offs (1 of them will definitely go down)

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Borac	16	11	3	2	23	9	36
Zeljeznicar	16	10	1	5	31	14	31
Sarajevo	16	8	4	4	22	13	28
Siroki Brijeg	16	8	1	7	32	25	25
Sloboda	16	7	3	6	16	15	24
Travnik	16	7	2	7	26	22	23
Celik	16	6	4	6	17	15	22
Rudar	16	5	7	4	17	18	22
Slavija	16	7	1	8	23	25	22
Olimpik	16	6	3	7	14	18	21
Leotar	16	6	3	7	16	26	21
Zvijezda	16	5	5	6	15	18	20
Buducnost	15	4	5	6	15	18	17
Zrinjski	16	5	1	10	16	23	16
Velez	16	5	1	10	17	29	16
Drina	15	4	2	9	12	24	14

Standings on March 1
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

BULGARIA

Feb 26: Levski 1 CSKA 3; Akademik 1 Chernomorets 1; Lokomotiv Plovdiv 3 Vidima-Rakovski 0; Pirin 0 Cherno More 1; Beroe 1 Sliven 0.
Feb 27: Minyor 0 Lovech 3; Kaliakra 0 Slavia 1.
Feb 28: Lokomotiv Sofia 2 Montana 0.

BULGARIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lovech	16	12	4	0	28	8	40
Levski	16	10	2	4	33	18	32
Lok Sofia	16	10	1	5	33	18	31
Lok Plovdiv	16	8	5	3	30	14	29
CSKA	16	8	5	3	25	16	29
Chernomorets	16	7	8	1	13	8	29
Slavia	16	8	2	6	26	20	26
Beroe	16	7	5	4	16	15	26
Cherno More	16	8	1	7	18	21	25
Montana	16	4	4	8	17	23	16
Kaliakra	16	4	4	8	9	20	16
Akademik	16	3	4	9	11	22	13
Minyor	16	3	3	10	18	33	12
Pirin	16	2	5	9	10	22	11
Sliven	16	2	4	10	12	23	10
V-Rakovski	16	2	3	11	12	30	9

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated; 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

BULGARIA

Eternal happiness

CSKA won 3-1 at Levski in Sofia's "Eternal Derby" as the A League resumed after its winter break.

ENGLAND

Arsenal denied by City

Arsenal's six-year trophy wait continues after they were beaten 2-1 in the League Cup Final by Birmingham City. Robin Van Persie had cancelled out Nikola Zigic's opener for City, who won with an 89th-minute goal from Obafemi Martins.

Alex McLeish's side now go into the third qualifying round of next season's Europa League.

Arsenal's hopes of league success also suffered a blow when they squandered a four-goal lead against Newcastle United, who staged the biggest fightback in Premier League history to come from 4-0 down with 22 minutes remaining to draw 4-4.

Goals...Zigic (left) and Martins

On that same weekend, Manchester United suffered their first league defeat in 308 days, Wolverhampton Wanderers winning 2-1 to deny United a new club record of 30 league games unbeaten. United remain four points clear of Arsenal at the top following their 4-0 win at Wigan Athletic.

Tottenham Hotspur remain in fourth, but their hopes of hanging on to the final Champions League spot were hurt by a 3-1 defeat at Blackpool, for whom Brett Ormerod became the first player to score in all four English divisions for the same club.

CROATIA

Feb 25: Lokomotiva 0 Osijek 0; Zagreb 1 Sibenik 1.
Feb 26: Istra 0 Hrvatski Dragovoljac 1; Hajduk 0 Inter 0; Slaven 1 Split 2; Karlovac 0 Dinamo 1; Varazdin 3 Rijeka 0.

CROATIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	19	15	3	1	41	9	48
Hajduk	19	12	5	2	39	15	41
Cibalia	18	9	3	6	24	14	30
Split	19	9	3	7	23	14	30
Inter	19	8	5	6	17	17	29
Varazdin	19	7	7	5	19	21	28
Karlovac	19	8	2	9	17	17	26
Rijeka	19	7	4	8	22	29	25
Slaven	19	6	6	7	19	20	24
Osijek	19	5	8	6	20	20	23
Zadar	18	7	2	9	23	24	23
Zagreb	19	6	4	9	17	22	22
Lokomotiva	19	6	4	9	17	27	22
Sibenik	19	4	7	8	22	26	19
Istra	19	5	3	11	14	28	18
H Dragovoljac	19	2	4	13	12	43	10

30-round season (15x2); bottom 5 will be relegated

CYPRUS

Regular season

Feb 5: Apollon 2 Olympiakos 1; AEK 1 APOEL 2; Omonia 2 AEL 0.
Feb 6: AEP 3 Ermis 1; Anorthosis 3 ENP 1; Doxa 3 Alki 0; Ethnikos 0 APOP 0.
Feb 12: Olympiakos 2 AEK 3; ENP 2 AEP 1.
Feb 13: AEL 2 Apollon 3; APOP 1 Alki 2; Anorthosis 4 Doxa 1.
Feb 14: Ermis 0 Omonia 0; APOEL 0 Ethnikos 1.
Feb 19: AEP 1 Anorthosis 2; Ethnikos 0 Olympiakos 1; AEK 0 AEL 0.
Feb 20: Apollon 1 Ermis 1; Doxa 4 APOP 3; Alki 2 APOEL 1.
Feb 21: Omonia 0 ENP 0.
Feb 26: AEL 2 Ethnikos 1; ENP 2 Apollon 1; AEP 5 Doxa 0; Ermis 1 AEK 1.
Feb 27: APOEL 6 APOP 2; Anorthosis 0 Omonia 0.
Feb 28: Olympiakos 1 Alki 1.

CYPRUS – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APOEL	23	17	2	4	50	18	53
Omonia	23	13	7	3	31	13	46
AEK	23	11	6	6	33	25	39
Anorthosis	22	10	6	6	40	26	36
Apollon	23	10	5	8	37	34	35
Olympiakos	23	7	9	7	35	37	30
ENP	23	8	6	9	20	23	30
AEL	23	7	9	7	26	30	30
Ethnikos	23	6	9	8	22	24	27
Alki	23	7	5	11	26	34	26
AEP	23	5	7	11	30	34	22
Ermis	22	4	9	9	22	35	21
Doxa	23	5	5	13	24	46	20
APOP	23	4	7	12	22	39	19

26-round regular season (13x2); top 4 will enter championship play-offs; 5th to 8th will enter "placement" play-offs; 9th to 12th will enter relegation play-offs (1 of them will be relegated); bottom 2 (13th & 14th places) will be relegated automatically

CZECH REPUBLIC

Feb 25: Slavia 1 Brno 1.
Feb 26: Slovacko 1 Bohemians 1905 3; Pribram 0 Mlada Boleslav 0; Plzen 2 Hradec Kralove 1.
Feb 27: Usti nad Labem 0 Olomouc 3; Ceske Budejovice 2 Teplice 2; Jablonec 3 Liberec 0.
Feb 28: Ostrava 0 Sparta 2.

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plzen	18	14	2	2	45	17	44
Sparta	18	13	1	4	31	11	40
Olomouc	18	10	4	4	37	14	34
Jablonec	18	10	3	5	34	19	33
M Boleslav	18	8	7	3	31	21	31
Teplice	18	7	5	6	24	25	26
Boh'ians 1905	18	7	4	7	22	21	25
Liberec	18	6	5	7	24	24	23
Slovacko	18	6	2	10	18	30	20
Ostrava	18	5	4	9	19	25	19
Pribram	18	4	7	7	11	19	19
C Budejovice	18	4	7	7	15	30	19
H Kralove	18	4	6	8	13	21	18
Slavia	18	3	8	7	19	26	17
Brno	18	5	1	12	23	36	16
Usti	18	2	6	10	13	40	12

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

DENMARK

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Copenhagen	19	16	3	0	50	15	51
OB	19	10	2	7	36	28	32
Brondby	19	8	6	5	31	26	30
Midtjylland	18	8	5	5	31	21	29
Horsens	19	7	3	9	17	26	24
Lyngby	18	6	5	7	26	31	23
SonderjyskE	19	6	4	9	22	28	22
Silkeborg	19	5	7	7	24	31	22
Nordsjaelland	19	6	4	9	21	28	22
Randers	19	3	10	6	22	25	19
Esbjerg	19	3	8	8	22	31	17
AaB	19	3	7	9	18	30	16

33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ENGLAND

Tuesday, February 1

Arsenal 2 (Arshavin 69, Koscielny 74)
Everton 1 (Saha 23) Att: 60,014

Manchester United 3 (Rooney 1, 45, Vidic 62)
Aston Villa 1 (Bent 58) Att: 75,256

Sunderland 2 (Bardsley 4, Richardson 25)
Chelsea 4 (Lampard pen 15, Kalou 23, Terry 59, Anelka 90) Att: 37,855

West Bromwich 2 (Odemwingie 5, Fortune 79)
Wigan 2 (N'Zogbia 19, Watson 42) Att: 25,358

Wednesday, February 2

Birmingham 2 (Zigic 22, Gardner pen 76)
Manchester City 2 (Tevez 4, Kolarov 41) Att: 24,379

Blackburn 0
Tottenham 1 (Crouch 4) Att: 23,253

Blackpool 1 (Adam 41)
West Ham 3 (Obinna 24, 44, Keane 36) Att: 15,095

Bolton 1 (Sturridge 90)
Wolverhampton 0 Att: 18,944

Fulham 1 (Duff 67)
Newcastle 0 Att: 25,620

Liverpool 2 (Raul Meireles 47, Suarez 78)
Stoke 0 Att: 40,254

Saturday, February 5

Aston Villa 2 (Paintsil og 12, Walker 72)
Fulham 2 (Johnson 52, Dempsey 77) Att: 35,899

Everton 5 (Saha 20, 46, 75, 84, Beckford 80)
Blackpool 3 (Baptiste 36, Puncheon 62, Adam 63) Att: 38,202

Manchester City 3 (Tevez pen 16, 22, pen 39)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 46,846

Newcastle 4 (Barton pen 67, pen 82, Best 75, Tiote 86)
Arsenal 4 (Walcott 1, Djourou 3, Van Persie 9, 25) Att: 51,561

Stoke 3 (Carew 32, Huth 83, 90)
Sunderland 2 (Richardson 2, Gyan 48) Att: 26,008

Tottenham 2 (Van der Vaart pen 5, Kranjcar 90)
Bolton 1 (Sturridge 54) Att: 36,197

Wigan 4 (McCarthy 35, 55, Rodallega 50, Watson pen 64)
Blackburn 3 (Roberts 22, Samba 58, Dunn pen 81) Att: 18,567

Wolverhampton 2 (Elokobi 9, Doyle 40)
Manchester United 1 (Nani 3) Att: 28,811

Sunday, February 6

Chelsea 0
Liverpool 1 (Raul Meireles 69) Att: 41,829

West Ham 0
Birmingham 1 (Zigic 64) Att: 32,927

Saturday, February 12

Arsenal 2 (Van Persie 15, 55)
Wolverhampton 0 Att: 60,050

Birmingham 1 (Zigic 90)
Stoke 0 Att: 23,660

Blackburn 0
Newcastle 0 Att: 26,781

Blackpool 1 (Grandin 13)
Aston Villa 1 (Agbonlahor 10) Att: 16,000

Liverpool 1 (Raul Meireles 24)
Wigan 1 (Gohouri 64) Att: 44,609

Manchester United 2 (Nani 41, Rooney 78)
Manchester City 1 (Silva 65) Att: 75,322

Sunderland 1 (Gyan 11)
Tottenham 2 (Dawson 43, Kranjcar 56) Att: 40,986

West Bromwich 3 (Dorrans 2, Thomas 8, Reid og 32)
West Ham 3 (Ba 49, 82, Cole 58) Att: 23,916

Sunday, February 13

Bolton 2 (Cahill 10, Sturridge 67)
Everton 0 Att: 22,986

Monday, February 14

Fulham 0
Chelsea 0 Att: 25,685

Tuesday, February 15

Birmingham 0
Newcastle 2 (Lovenkrands 3, Best 49) Att: 28,270

Sunday, February 20

West Bromwich 1 (Vela 90)
Wolverhampton 1 (O'Hara 38) Att: 26,170

Tuesday, February 22

Blackpool 3 (Adam pen 17, Campbell 43, Ormerod 79)
Tottenham 1 (Pavlyuchenko 90) Att: 16,069

Wednesday, February 23

Arsenal 1 (Squillaci 8)
Stoke 0 Att: 60,041

Saturday, February 26

Aston Villa 4 (A Young pen 48, 81, Hanley og 61, Downing 64)
Blackburn 1 (Kalinic 81) Att: 34,309

Everton 2 (Beckford 7, 39)
Sunderland 0 Att: 37,776

Newcastle 1 (Nolan 13)
Bolton 1 (Sturridge 37) Att: 48,062

Wigan 0
Manchester United 4 (Hernandez 17, 73, Rooney 84, Fabio 87) Att: 18,140

Wolverhampton 4 (Jarvis 2, O'Hara 53, Ebanks-Blake 77, 89)
Blackpool 0 Att: 29,086

Sunday, February 27

Manchester City 1 (Balotelli 26)
Fulham 1 (Duff 48) Att: 43,077

West Ham 3 (Parker 22, Ba 44, Cole 90)
Liverpool 1 (Johnson 83) Att: 34,941

Monday, February 28

Stoke 1 (Delap 53)
West Bromwich 1 (Vela 87) Att: 25,019

ENGLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man United	27	17	9	1	61	25	60
Arsenal	27	17	5	5	57	27	56
Man City	28	14	8	6	44	25	50
Tottenham	27	13	8	6	38	31	47
Chelsea	26	13	6	7	46	22	45
Liverpool	28	11	6	11	36	35	39
Bolton	28	9	10	9	39	38	37
Sunderland	28	9	10	9	33	35	37
Newcastle	28	9	9	10	43	39	36
Stoke	28	10	4	14	32	35	34
Everton	27	7	12	8	35	36	33
Aston Villa	28	8	9	11	35	47	33
Fulham	28	6	14	8	29	29	32
Blackburn	28	9	5	14	35	46	32
Blackpool	28	9	5	14	42	55	32
Birmingham	26	6	12	8	25	35	30
West Brom	28	7	8	13	36	53	29
Wolves	28	8	4	16	31	46	28
West Ham	28	6	10	12	33	49	28
Wigan	28	5	12	11	27	49	27

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

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ENGLAND

Moving from London

Next year's Community Shield, which is due to be played on August 12, 2012, will not be held at Wembley as the Olympic Games do not conclude until that day. Agreement has been reached with the FA that the game will be staged outside London.

FRANCE

Warrior spirit needed

After their 3-0 defeat at Bordeaux, Auxerre's winless run in all competitions was stretched to 17 games, leaving them in 17th place in Ligue 1, just a point above the relegation zone.

"The club is in danger," says captain Benoit Pedretti, whose side began the season in a Champions League group with Milan and Real Madrid. "We have to wake up and rediscover a warrior's mentality."

Despite the victory, Bordeaux boss Jean Tigana offered his resignation, which was rejected.

Just two points separate the top four in the table after Lille were held 1-1 by fifth-place Lyon.

Beaten again...Auxerre (in white)

502 Ligue 1 appearances that Lille goalkeeper Mickael Landreau has made, up to and including the 1-1 draw at home to Lyon

LEADING GOALSCORERS

19 Dimitar Berbatov (Manchester United)
18 Carlos Tevez (Manchester City)
11 Andy Carroll (Newcastle/Liverpool)
11 Kevin Nolan (Newcastle)
10 Darren Bent (Sunderland/Aston Villa)
10 Didier Drogba (Chelsea)
10 Rafael Van der Vaart (Tottenham)
10 Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)

FA CUP

Last 32

Replays

Feb 16: Wigan 0 Bolton 1.
Feb 19: Chelsea 1 Everton 1 (aet; Everton 4-3 on pens).
Feb 20: Manchester City 5 Notts County 0.

Last 16

Feb 19: Birmingham 3 Sheffield Wednesday 0; Manchester United 1 Crawley 0; Stoke 3 Brighton 0.
Feb 20: Fulham 0 Bolton 1; Leyton Orient 1 Arsenal 1.
Feb 21: West Ham 5 Burnley 1.

Still to play: Everton v Reading; Manchester City v Aston Villa.

LEAGUE CUP

Final

Feb 27 - Wembley
Arsenal 1 (Van Persie 39)
Birmingham 2 (Zigic 28, Martins 89)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 88,851. **Ref:** Dean

FRANCE

Saturday, February 5

Brest 2 (Ayite 43, Grougi 88)
Nancy 1 (Brou Apanga og 73) Att: 12,280

Caen 0
Lorient 2 (Amalfitano 22, Gameiro 86) Att: 13,438

Lens 1 (Jemaa 37)
Valenciennes 1 (Dossevi 39) Att: 32,290

Marseille 1 (Gignac 54)
Arles-Avignon 0 Att: 47,737

Montpellier 1 (Martin 85)
Saint-Etienne 2 (Riviere 12, 37) Att: 18,035

Nice 1 (Pejcinovic 28)
Sochaux 0 Att: 6,699

Rennes 1 (Brahimi 19)
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 26,001

Sunday, February 6

Auxerre 1 (Dudka 85)
Lille 1 (Sow 8) Att: 10,865

Lyon 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 35,909

Toulouse 2 (Sissoko 47, 76)
Monaco 0 Att: 24,652

Saturday, February 12

Arles-Avignon 0
Montpellier 0 Att: 8,489

Bordeaux 1 (Modeste 48)
Caen 2 (Traore 10, Hamouma 90) Att: 21,852

Monaco 3 (Lolo 3, Mangani 56, Park pen 90+3)
Lorient 1 (Gameiro 22) Att: 4,921

Nancy 3 (Feret 9, Cuvillier 14, Hadji 47)
Auxerre 1 (Jelen 54) Att: 14,102

Paris Saint-Germain 0
Lens 0 Att: 32,959

Saint-Etienne 1 (Bocanegra 13)
Lyon 4 (Gomis 28, Bayal Sall og 40, Michel Bastos 69, Briand 90+1) Att: 34,686

Sochaux 1 (Brown 42)
Marseille 2 (Gignac 45+1, 70) Att: 19,905

Sunday, February 13

Lille 2 (Gervinho 37, De Melo 90+4)
Toulouse 0 Att: 15,941

Rennes 2 (Montano 52, Boukari pen 58)
Nice 0 Att: 18,387

Valenciennes 3 (Ducourtioux 14, Bisevac 21, Pujol 69)
Brest 0 Att: 10,682

Friday, February 18

Lyon 4 (Gourcuff 37, Pied 75, Pjanic 85, Briand 88)
Nancy 0 Att: 31,957

Saturday, February 19

Auxerre 1 (Jelen 84)
Arles-Avignon 1 (N'Diaye 64) Att: 10,315

Brest 2 (Ayite 13, pen 88)
Monaco 0 Att: 13,271

Caen 2 (Nivet 46, Yatabare 63)
Valenciennes 2 (Pujol 84, Langil 90) Att: 13,648

Lens 2 (Jemaa 35, Yahia 59)
Sochaux 3 (Maurice-Belay 5, Maiga 29, Boudebouz 65) Att: 30,338

Lorient 5 (Amalfitano 14, Gameiro 35, 38, 87, Mvuemba pen 60)
Bordeaux 1 (Fernando 39) Att: 15,513

Marseille 2 (Gonzalez 67, Remy 77)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Landrin 90+5) Att: 53,494

Sunday, February 20

Montpellier 1 (Belhanda 83)
Lille 0 Att: 16,934

Nice 0
Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Giuly 24, Hoarau 44, Armand 74) Att: 8,655

Toulouse 1 (Theophile-Catherine og 60)
Rennes 2 (M'Vila 45+1, Montano pen 88) Att: 21,378

Saturday, February 26

Arles-Avignon 1 (Ghilas 37)
Brest 1 (Toure 49) Att: 7,405

Bordeaux 3 (Diarra 12, Modeste pen 53, Plasil 78)
Auxerre 0 Att: 22,983

Monaco 2 (Park pen 34, 62)
Caen 2 (El Arabi 66, Mollo 72) Att: 5,142

Rennes 2 (Boukari 13, Montano 69)
Lens 0 Att: 22,745

Saint-Etienne 0
Nice 2 (Coulibaly 54, Mounier 85) Att: 19,793

Sochaux 0
Montpellier 0 Att: 12,085

Valenciennes 0
Lorient 0 Att: 10,350

Sunday, February 27

Lille 1 (Sow 7)
Lyon 1 (Kallstrom 26) Att: 17,166

Nancy 1 (Feret 34)
Marseille 2 (A Ayew 45, 87) Att: 20,019

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Armand 28, Gunino og 38)
Toulouse 1 (Tabanou 62) Att: 29,860

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lille	25	12	10	3	43	24	46
Rennes	25	13	7	5	30	18	46
Marseille	25	12	9	4	36	21	45
PSG	25	12	8	5	39	25	44
Lyon	25	11	9	5	39	25	42
Montpellier	25	10	8	7	21	23	38
Saint-Etienne	25	9	8	8	33	32	35
Lorient	25	10	5	10	32	31	35
Brest	25	9	8	8	26	25	35
Bordeaux	25	8	10	7	32	30	34
Toulouse	25	10	3	12	27	28	33
Sochaux	25	9	5	11	39	31	32
Valenciennes	25	7	10	8	30	27	31
Caen	25	7	8	10	28	36	29
Nice	25	7	8	10	17	27	29
Nancy	25	8	4	13	27	41	28
Auxerre	25	4	14	7	29	33	26
Monaco	25	4	13	8	25	28	25
Lens	25	5	9	11	24	40	24
Arles-Avignon	25	1	8	16	13	45	11

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

LEADING GOALSCORERS

17 Moussa Sow (Lille)
15 Kevin Gameiro (Lorient)
13 Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)
12 Youssef El Arabi (Caen)
11 Gervinho (Lille)

FRENCH CUP

Last 16

Feb 1: Angers 2 Strasbourg 0; Lorient 3 Metz 0; Rennes 3 Reims 4 (aet).
Feb 2: Chambery 2 Sochaux 1; Martigues 1 Paris Saint-Germain 4; Nancy 1 Le Mans 2; Drancy 0 Nice 1; Lille 1 Nantes 1 (aet; Lille 3-2 on pens).

GERMANY

Friday, February 4

Borussia Dortmund 0
Schalke 0 Att: 80,720

Saturday, February 5

Hannover 1 (Pinto 5)
Wolfsburg 0 Att: 37,213

1899 Hoffenheim 3 (Sigurdsson 27, Rudy 39, Ibisevic 62)
Kaiserslautern 2 (Hoffer 58, Rodnei 59) Att: 30,150

Koln 3 (Clemens 55, Novakovic 62, 72)
Bayern Munich 2 (Gomez 21, Altintop 43) Att: 50,000

Mainz 1 (Schurrle 18)
Werder Bremen 1 (Pizarro 90+2) Att: 20,300

Monchengladbach 2 (Dante 29, De Camargo 30)
Stuttgart 3 (Pogrebnyak 50, Harnik 56, Gebhart pen 86) Att: 39,132

Nurnberg 1 (Eigler 60)
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 34,113

Sunday, February 6

Freiburg 0
Eintracht Frankfurt 0 Att: 21,900

Saturday, February 12

Bayern Munich 4 (Gomez 2, Muller 14, Robben 62, 81)
1899 Hoffenheim 0 Att: 69,000

Eintracht Frankfurt 0
Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Rolfes 8, Renato Augusto 32, Balitsch 83) Att: 42,600

Kaiserslautern 1 (Moravek 90)
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Bender 80) Att: 49,780

Schalke 1 (Farfan 49)
Freiburg 0 Att: 60,439

St Pauli 3 (Kruse 36, Asamoah 53, Lehmann 57)
Monchengladbach 1 (De Camargo 9) Att: 24,487

Stuttgart 1 (Funk 45+2)
Nurnberg 4 (Simons 11, Schieber 28, Chandler 50, Ekici 63) Att: 38,000

Wolfsburg 0
Hamburg 1 (Petric pen 33) Att: 30,000

Sunday, February 13

Koln 4 (Podolski 2, 55, Novakovic 43, 59)
Mainz 2 (Allagui 31, Sliskovic 89) Att: 44,000

Werder Bremen 1 (Mertesacker 49)
Hannover 1 (Ya Konan 25) Att: 39,500

Wednesday, February 16

Hamburg 0
St Pauli 1 (Asamoah 58) Att: 57,000

Friday, February 18

Nurnberg 3 (Schieber 66, Mak 86, Cohen 90)
Eintracht Frankfurt 0 Att: 40,853

Saturday, February 19

Borussia Dortmund 2 (Barrios 38, Gunesch og 49)
St Pauli 0 Att: 80,720

Freiburg 2 (Reisinger 43, Cisse 69)
Wolfsburg 1 (Helmes 28) Att: 19,200

Hamburg 4 (Petric 41, Guerrero 63, 78, Ben Hatira 86)
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 54,121

Hannover 3 (Schlaudraff 16, 56, Abdellaoue 45)
Kaiserslautern 0 Att: 35,412

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Novakovic og 48)
Koln 1 (Mohamad 68) Att: 30,000

Mainz 1 (Allagui 84)
Bayern Munich 3 (Schweinsteiger 9, Muller 49, Gomez 77) Att: 20,300

Celebration...Dortmund

GERMANY

Dortmund close in

Borussia Dortmund's 3-1 victory away to Bayern Munich gave Jurgen Klopp's side a 12-point lead over second-place Bayer Leverkusen with 10 games to play in the Bundesliga.

Luis Gustavo's first goal for defending champions Bayern since his January move from Hoffenheim cancelled out Lucas Barrios' opener, before Nuri Sahin and Mats Hummels hit back to secure all three points for the visitors. Australian keeper Mitchell Langerak made his Bundesliga debut after Dortmund captain Roman Weidenfeller failed a late fitness test.

Eintracht Frankfurt are still searching for their first goal of 2011 after their Bundesliga scoring drought extended to seven games following the 2-0 home defeat to Stuttgart. Misfiring Eintracht last scored a league goal in a 1-0 win over Dortmund in December.

HOLLAND

Twente slip up

Second-place Twente failed to capitalise on PSV's draw at home to Ajax as they

Stopped...Twente (right)

Sunday, February 20

Bayer Leverkusen 4 (Kiessling 5, 90+1, Castro 41, Reinartz 80)
Stuttgart 2 (Harnik 16, Kuzmanovic 52) Att: 28,851

Monchengladbach 2 (Reus 11, Idrissou 23)
Schalke 1 (Kluge 2) Att: 51,592

Friday, February 25

Wolfsburg 2 (Diego 35, 45+1)
Monchengladbach 1 (Daems pen 74) Att: 28,763

Saturday, February 26

Bayern Munich 1 (Luiz Gustavo 16)
Borussia Dortmund 3 (Barrios 9, Sahin 18, Hummels 60) Att: 69,000

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Alaba 83)
Mainz 2 (Ivanschitz 23, Soto 86) Att: 29,000

Kaiserslautern 1 (Hlousek 17)
Hamburg 1 (Jansen 53) Att: 45,682

Koln 1 (Podolski 87)
Freiburg 0 Att: 45,500

Schalke 1 (Raul 52)
Nurnberg 1 (Hegeler 36) Att: 61,431

St Pauli 0
Hannover 1 (Schulz 89) Att: 24,487

Sunday, February 27

Eintracht Frankfurt 0
Stuttgart 2 (Harnik 64, Hajnal 68) Att: 47,400

Werder Bremen 2 (Kiessling og 82, Prodl 90+1)
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Derdiyok 42, Rolfes 67) Att: 37,500

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B Dortmund	24	18	4	2	52	14	58
B Leverkusen	24	13	7	4	50	34	46
Hannover	24	14	2	8	34	31	44
Bayern	24	12	6	6	50	30	42
Mainz	24	13	1	10	37	30	40
Hamburg	24	11	4	9	35	32	37
Freiburg	24	11	4	9	31	31	37
Nurnberg	24	10	6	8	34	32	36
Hoffenheim	24	8	9	7	41	35	33
Schalke	24	8	6	10	29	29	30
Koln	24	8	5	11	31	42	29
St Pauli	24	8	4	12	27	38	28
E Frankfurt	24	8	3	13	24	34	27
Wolfsburg	24	6	8	10	29	34	26
Werder	24	6	7	11	30	50	25
Kaiserslautern	24	6	6	12	33	42	24
Stuttgart	24	6	4	14	42	47	22
M'gladbach	24	5	4	15	35	59	19

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated; 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

LEADING GOALSCORERS

18 Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)
16 Papiss Demba Cisse (Freiburg)
14 Theofanis Gekas (Eintracht Frankfurt)
11 Lucas Barrios (Borussia Dortmund)
11 Srdjan Lakic (Kaiserslautern)
11 Raul (Schalke)
11 Didier Ya Konan (Hannover)

GREECE

Feb 5: Asteras 1 Larissa 1; Panserraikos 1 Iraklis 2; AEK 1 Aris 2.
Feb 6: Olympiakos 1 Xanthi 0; Ergotelis 2 Panionios 0; Kavala 1 Kerkyra 0; Volos 2 Atromitos 0; PAOK 0 Panathinaikos 1.
Feb 12: Ergotelis 2 Kavala 1; Panionios 1 PAOK 0; Aris 1 Olympiakos 2.
Feb 13: Kerkyra 3 Panserraikos 0; Iraklis 0 Asteras 0; Larissa 1 Volos 2; Xanthi 3 Atromitos 0; Panathinaikos 3 AEK 1.
Feb 19: Asteras 0 Kerkyra 2; Kavala 0 Panserraikos 0; Olympiakos 2 Panathinaikos 1.
Feb 20: Volos 1 Iraklis 1; Atromitos 0 Aris 0; AEK 1 Panionios 1; Xanthi 1 Larissa 1.
Feb 26: Kerkyra 1 Volos 3; Iraklis 1 Xanthi 1; Panathinaikos 1 Atromitos 1.
Feb 27: Panserraikos 0 Asteras 1; Larissa 2 Aris 2; PAOK 0 Kavala 2; Ergotelis 2 AEK 3; Panionios 1 Olympiakos 1.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	24	20	1	3	45	12	61
Panathinaikos	24	15	6	3	39	18	51
AEK	24	11	4	9	37	29	37
Kavala	24	9	8	7	26	21	35
Volos	24	8	11	5	28	22	35
PAOK	23	10	4	9	23	22	34
Ergotelis	23	9	4	10	23	28	31
Aris	24	8	6	10	16	21	30
Kerkyra	24	8	6	10	23	28	30
Iraklis	24	6	11	7	19	23	29
Xanthi	24	7	8	9	23	26	29
Atromitos	24	6	10	8	23	27	28
Panionios	24	6	8	10	16	26	26
Asteras	24	5	10	9	15	22	25
Larissa	24	4	8	12	19	31	20
Panserraikos	24	4	5	15	18	37	17

30-round season (15x2); bottom 3 will be relegated; teams finishing 2nd to 5th will enter play-offs for Greece's 2nd Champions League place

HOLLAND

Feb 1: De Graafschap 0 Utrecht 0.
Feb 4: Ajax 2 De Graafschap 0.
Feb 5: Heerenveen 0 NEC 0; Excelsior 2 AZ 1; PSV 0 Den Haag 1; VVV 3 NAC 0.
Feb 6: Vitesse 1 Feyenoord 1; Heracles 1 Roda JC 0; Utrecht 1 Twente 1; Groningen 7 Willem II 1.
Feb 12: Den Haag 3 VVV 0; Willem II 3 Utrecht 3; Feyenoord 2 Heracles 1; Twente 1 Vitesse 0; AZ 0 PSV 4.
Feb 13: NAC 0 Heerenveen 2; Roda JC 2 Ajax 2; NEC 2 Excelsior 0; De Graafschap 1 Groningen 1.
Feb 18: Utrecht 1 Heracles 1.
Feb 19: Excelsior 4 Willem II 0; Heerenveen 0 AZ 2; Groningen 1 Roda JC 4.
Feb 20: Den Haag 2 Feyenoord 2; Twente 1 NEC 1; Ajax 1 VVV 0; Vitesse 2 De Graafschap 0; PSV 4 NAC 1.
Feb 25: VVV 1 Excelsior 0.
Feb 26: Willem II 4 Heerenveen 3; Heracles 6 Vitesse 1; Roda JC 1 De Graafschap 1; NAC 3 Den Haag 2.
Feb 27: Feyenoord 5 Groningen 1; AZ 2 Twente 1; PSV 0 Ajax 0; NEC 1 Utrecht 1.

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	25	16	6	3	66	22	54
Twente	25	15	6	4	48	27	51
Ajax	25	14	7	4	47	22	49
Groningen	25	13	5	7	52	38	44
AZ	25	12	7	6	38	28	43
Den Haag	25	12	6	7	47	37	42
Roda JC	25	10	10	5	44	34	40
Utrecht	25	10	7	8	41	33	37
Heerenveen	25	9	7	9	47	39	34
NAC*	25	10	4	11	35	44	33
NEC	25	7	11	7	40	40	32
Heracles	25	7	7	11	40	44	28
Feyenoord	25	7	7	11	34	43	28
De Graafschap	25	6	9	10	24	43	27
Vitesse	25	6	7	12	30	44	25
Excelsior	25	6	4	15	29	48	22
VVV	25	5	1	19	23	55	16
Willem II	25	2	5	18	26	70	11

34-round season (17x2); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs
**1pt deducted for financial mismanagement*

ISRAEL

Regular season

Feb 5: Maccabi Haifa 1 Bnei Sakhnin 0; Be'er Sheva 5 Ashdod 0; Maccabi Petah Tikva 2 Hapoel Petah Tikva 3; Netanya 2 Ramat Gan 0; Kiryat Shmona 1 Hapoel Haifa 3; Acre 1 Ashkelon 0; Beitar 1 Bnei Yehuda 1.
Feb 6: Maccabi Tel Aviv 1 Hapoel Tel Aviv 1.
Feb 12: Ramat Gan 0 Maccabi Tel Aviv 3; Bnei Yehuda 1 Acre 0; Hapoel Haifa 1 Netanya 2; Hapoel Petah Tikva 3 Be'er Sheva 1; Ashdod 1 Maccabi Haifa 2; Bnei Sakhnin 1 Beitar 0.
Feb 13: Ashkelon 0 Kiryat Shmona 1.
Feb 14: Hapoel Tel Aviv 2 Maccabi Petah Tikva 0.
Feb 19: Maccabi Tel Aviv 0 Hapoel Haifa 1; Beitar 0 Ashdod 0; Netanya 3 Ashkelon 0; Maccabi Petah Tikva 4 Ramat Gan 1; Bnei Sakhnin 0 Bnei Yehuda 1; Be'er Sheva 0 Hapoel Tel Aviv 3.
Feb 20: Kiryat Shmona 2 Acre 2.
Feb 21: Maccabi Haifa 2 Hapoel Petah Tikva 0.
Feb 25: Bnei Yehuda 3 Kiryat Shmona 1; Acre 0 Netanya 0; Ashkelon 2 Maccabi Tel Aviv 4;

UP TO AND INCLUDING FEBRUARY 27 GAMES

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Lionel Messi	Barcelona (Spa)	26	2	52
2	Cristiano Ronaldo	Real Madrid (Spa)	24	2	48
3	Antonio Di Natale	Udinese (Ita)	21	2	42
4	Edinson Cavani	Napoli (Ita)	20	2	40
5	Dimitar Berbatov	Manchester United (Eng)	19	2	38
6	Mario Gomez	Bayern Munich (Ger)	18	2	36
	Kenny Miller	Rangers (Sco)/Bursaspor (Tur)	24	1.5	36
	Carlos Tevez	Manchester City (Eng)	18	2	36
9	Moussa Sow	Lille (Fra)	17	2	34
	David Villa	Barcelona (Spa)	17	2	34
11	Papiss Demba Cisse	Freiburg (Ger)	16	2	32
	Marco Di Vaio	Bologna (Ita)	16	2	32
	Samuel Eto'o	Internazionale (Ita)	16	2	32
14	Kevin Gameiro	Lorient (Fra)	15	2	30
15	Hulk	Porto (Por)	19	1.5	28.5
	Welliton Soares	Spartak Moscow (Rus)	19	1.5	28.5
17	Theofanis Gekas	Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)	14	2	28
	Fernando Llorente	Athletic Bilbao (Spa)	14	2	28
	Alessandro Matri	Cagliari (Ita)/Juventus (Ita)	14	2	28
20	Djibril Cisse	Panathinaikos (Gre)	18	1.5	27
21	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Milan (Ita)	13	2	26
	Nene	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)	13	2	26
	Pedro	Barcelona (Spa)	13	2	26
24	Alex de Souza	Fenerbahce (Tur)	17	1.5	25.5
	Bjorn Vleminckx	NEC Nijmegen (Hol)	17	1.5	25.5

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Held up...victim Hernandez

ITALY

Hernandez robbed

Palermo's Uruguayan striker Abel Hernandez was robbed at gun point in the city after a training session and forced to hand over cash and jewellery.

"What happened to Hernandez was a humiliating episode for the city of Palermo," said club president Maurizio Zamparini. "Firstly, the incident has nothing to do with football. It was a fact that can happen anywhere. But the criminals see players and think there is cash and jewellery there."

SCOTLAND

Celtic slip in title race

Celtic's 17-match unbeaten run came to an end with a 2-0 defeat at Motherwell, a result which cut their lead at the top of the table to five points over Rangers, who have two games in hand.

Next season's Premier League will kick off on July 23 – making it the season's earliest ever start. Clubs will, however, be allowed to opt out of one early fixture if they have been invited to take part in lucrative friendly tournaments over the summer.

End of run...Barcelona (left)

CLUB FOOTBALL

Hapoel Haifa 1 Maccabi Petah Tikva 1; Ramat Gan 0 Be'er Sheva 0; Hapoel Petah Tikva 1 Beitar 0; Ashdod 0 Bnei Sakhnin 0.
Feb 27: Hapoel Tel Aviv 4 Maccabi Haifa 1.

ISRAEL – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
H Tel Aviv	24	17	4	3	57	21	55
M Haifa	24	16	6	2	41	20	54
M Tel Aviv	24	15	3	6	37	18	48
Kiryat Shmona	24	11	7	6	42	29	40
M Petah Tikva	24	10	5	9	41	32	35
Acre	24	9	8	7	38	31	35
Bnei Yehuda	24	9	8	7	24	23	35
Netanya	24	9	7	8	29	27	34
H Haifa	24	9	7	8	29	31	34
Be'er Sheva	24	8	8	8	29	28	32
Ashdod	24	7	7	10	28	39	28
Beitar	24	6	7	11	24	30	25
H Petah Tikva	24	6	5	13	26	43	23
Ashkelon	24	5	5	14	20	41	20
Bnei Sakhnin	24	5	4	15	15	34	19
Ramat Gan*	24	1	7	16	14	47	6

30-round regular season (15x2); top 6 will enter championship play-offs; 7th to 10th will enter "placement" play-offs; bottom 6 will enter relegation play-offs (2 of them will go down)
**4pts deducted for contract irregularities*

ITALY

Tuesday, February 1
Milan 0
Lazio 0 Att: 38,809

Wednesday, February 2
Cesena 1 (Jimenez 30)
Catania 1 (Lopez 7) Att: 13,522

Chievo 2 (Moscardelli 19, Sardo 49)
Napoli 0 Att: 11,610

Fiorentina 1 (Santana 38)
Genoa 0 Att: 20,129

Palermo 2 (Miccoli 7, Migliaccio 19)
Juventus 1 (Marchisio 36) Att: 25,972

Parma 0
Lecce 1 (Chevanton 90+2) Att: 11,959

Roma 1 (Borriello 58)
Brescia 1 (Eder 69) Att: 26,590

Sampdoria 0
Cagliari 1 (Nainggolan 36) Att: 20,494

Udinese 1 (Domizzi 76)
Bologna 1 (Di Vaio 63) Att: 13,342

Thursday, February 3
Bari 0
Internazionale 3 (Kharja 69, Pazzini 90+4, Sneijder 90+5) Att: 36,121

Saturday, February 5
Cagliari 1 (Acquafresca 51)
Juventus 3 (Matri 19, 76, Toni 85) Att: 20,000

Udinese 2 (Sanchez 18, Di Natale 40)
Sampdoria 0 Att: 14,383

Sunday, February 6
Bologna 1 (Portanova 41)
Catania 0 Att: 15,107

Brescia 2 (Diamanti pen 17, Caracciolo 90+3)
Bari 0 Att: 6,000

Genoa 1 (Floro Flores 45+1)
Milan 1 (Alexandre Pato 29) Att: 24,134

Internazionale 5 (Sneijder 3, Eto'o 35, pen 63, Thiago Motta 71, Cambiasso 90)
Roma 3 (Simplicio 12, Vucinic 75, Loria 81) Att: 62,344

Lazio 1 (Hernanes 45+3)
Chievo 1 (Cesar 64) Att: 21,700

Lecce 2 (Giacomazzi 16, Jeda 50)
Palermo 4 (Miccoli 45+2, Pastore 57, Hernandez 59, Ilicic 61) Att: 9,176

Napoli 2 (Cavani 12, Sosa 90+1)
Cesena 0 Att: 34,565

Parma 1 (Amauri 15)
Fiorentina 1 (D'Agostino pen 48) Att: 13,446

Saturday, February 12
Milan 4 (Seedorf 8, Cassano 17, Robinho 61, 66)
Parma 0 Att: 46,119

Roma 0
Napoli 2 (Cavani pen 49, 83) Att: 32,354

Sunday, February 13
Bari 0
Genoa 0 Att: 14,812

Brescia 0
Lazio 2 (Gonzalez 16, Kozak 58) Att: 6,269

Cagliari 4 (Conti 18, Canini 29, Nene 42, 71)
Chievo 1 (Thereau 84) Att: 15,000

Catania 3 (Silvestre 45+2, Lodi 79, 85)
Lecce 2 (Jeda 56, Munari 61) Att: 13,810

Cesena 0
Udinese 3 (Di Natale 41, 74, Inler 69) Att: 16,704

Juventus 1 (Matri 30)
Internazionale 0 Att: 24,485

Palermo 2 (Pastore 7, Nocerino 48)
Fiorentina 4 (Gilardino 36, Camporese 69, Bovo og 77, Montolivo 88) Att: 24,571

Sampdoria 3 (Palombo 7, Gastaldello 10, Maccarone 14)
Bologna 1 (Paponi 64) Att: 20,924

Wednesday, February 16
Fiorentina 1 (Pasqual 33)
Internazionale 2 (Camporese og 6, Pazzini 61) Att: 31,595

Sampdoria 0
Genoa 1 (Rafinha 55) Att: 25,001

Saturday, February 19
Bologna 1 (Paponi 90)
Palermo 0 Att: 21,219

Internazionale 1 (Ranocchia 7)
Cagliari 0 Att: 50,000

Sunday, February 20
Chievo 1 (Fernandes 61)
Milan 2 (Robinho 25, Alexandre Pato 82) Att: 29,404

Fiorentina 0
Sampdoria 0 Att: 21,723

Genoa 4 (Palacio 52, 73, Paloschi 68, 85)
Roma 3 (Mexes 6, N Burdisso 15, Totti 51) Att: 22,180

Lazio 1 (Hernanes 6)
Bari 0 Att: 23,492

Lecce 2 (Mesbah 31, Bertolacci 48)
Juventus 0 Att: 20,368

Napoli 1 (Zuniga 25)
Catania 0 Att: 47,422

Parma 2 (Crespo pen 63, Palladino 88)
Cesena 2 (Rosina 30, Sammarco 79) Att: 13,999

Udinese 0
Brescia 0 Att: 15,214

Wednesday, February 23
Bologna 0
Roma 1 (De Rossi 44) Att: 19,663

Saturday, February 26
Juventus 0
Bologna 2 (Di Vaio 49, 65) Att: 20,843

Sunday, February 27
Bari 1 (Ghezzal 87)
Fiorentina 1 (Gilardino 21) Att: 14,739

Brescia 2 (Caracciolo 15, Zoboli 18)
Lecce 2 (Corvia 31, Munari 70) Att: 4,677

Cagliari 1 (Dias og 39)
Lazio 0 Att: 8,000

Catania 2 (Lopez 50, Bergessio 56)
Genoa 1 (Floro Flores 19) Att: 12,538

Cesena 1 (Jimenez pen 89)
Chievo 0 Att: 14,084

Palermo 0
Udinese 7 (Di Natale 10, 41, pen 59, Sanchez 19, 28, 41, 48) Att: 22,831

Roma 2 (Totti pen 19, Juan 35)
Parma 2 (Amauri 74, 79) Att: 28,499

Sampdoria 0
Internazionale 2 (Sneijder 72, Eto'o 90+4) Att: 24,417

Monday, February 28
Milan 3 (Ibrahimovic pen 48, Boateng 77, Alexandre Pato 78)
Napoli 0 Att: 77,276

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Milan	27	17	7	3	49	20	58
Inter	27	16	5	6	49	29	53
Napoli	27	16	4	7	41	25	52
Lazio	27	14	6	7	33	23	48
Udinese	27	14	5	8	49	30	47
Roma	27	12	7	8	41	38	43
Juventus	27	11	8	8	41	34	41
Palermo	27	12	4	11	44	43	40
Cagliari	27	11	5	11	33	28	38
Genoa	27	9	8	10	25	27	35
Bologna*	27	10	8	9	29	34	35
Fiorentina	27	8	10	9	29	29	34
Chievo	27	7	10	10	28	30	31
Sampdoria	27	7	10	10	23	29	31
Catania	27	7	8	12	24	35	29
Parma	27	6	10	11	27	38	28
Lecce	27	7	7	13	30	48	28
Cesena	27	6	7	14	20	36	25
Brescia	27	6	6	15	22	35	24
Bari	27	3	7	17	15	41	16

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated
**3pts deducted – 1pt for failing to pay tax on players' salaries, 2pts for failing to pay players' salaries*

LEADING GOALSCORERS

21	Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)
20	Edinson Cavani (Napoli)
16	Marco Di Vaio (Bologna)
16	Samuel Eto'o (Internazionale)
14	Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)
14	Alessandro Matri (Cagliari/Juventus)

POLAND

Feb 25: Cracovia 3 Legia 3; Arka 0 Wisla 1.
Feb 26: Polonia Bytom 1 Belchatow 1; Ruch 0 Lechia 0; Zaglebie 1 Korona 1.
Feb 27: Polonia Warsaw 0 Gornik 0; Lech 1 Widzew 0.

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jagiellonia	15	9	3	3	22	13	30
Wisla	16	9	3	4	22	15	30
Legia	16	9	1	6	22	22	28
Korona	16	7	5	4	21	18	26
Lechia	16	7	3	6	22	18	24
Belchatow	16	7	3	6	20	19	24
Gornik	16	7	2	7	15	25	23
Lech	16	6	4	6	19	14	22
Polonia W	16	5	6	5	23	18	21
Zaglebie	16	5	5	6	14	17	20
Slask	15	5	5	5	21	20	20
Ruch	16	4	6	6	12	14	18
Widzew	16	4	6	6	23	19	18
Polonia B	16	4	6	6	14	17	18
Arka	16	4	5	7	9	15	17
Cracovia	16	2	3	11	19	34	9

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

PORTUGAL

Feb 4: Sporting 3 Naval 3.
Feb 5: Maritimo 1 Braga 2.
Feb 6: Uniao Leiria 0 Olhanense 2; Academica 3 Beira Mar 3; Portimonense 0 Pacos Ferreira 1; Guimaraes 0 Nacional 0; Porto 1 Rio Ave 0; Setubal 0 Benfica 2.
Feb 12: Nacional 0 Uniao Leiria 1; Olhanense 2 Sporting 2.
Feb 13: Pacos Ferreira 1 Maritimo 0; Naval 3 Academica 1; Rio Ave 2 Portimonense 0; Benfica 3 Guimaraes 0; Braga 0 Porto 2.
Feb 14: Beira Mar 0 Setubal 0.

SPAIN

Barca record ended

Barcelona's record-breaking run of 16 consecutive wins in La Liga came to an end with a 1-1 draw away to Sporting Gijon. However, they still lead Real Madrid by seven points.

At the other end of the table, Malaga came from behind to win their relegation battle with Almeria and lift themselves off the bottom of the table. Malaga, who had not won in seven games, won 3-1 after going a goal behind. Almeria finished the game with just nine men after Jose Ulloa and Antonio Luna were both shown red cards

Dani Aranzubia became the first goalkeeper to score from open play in La Liga when his injury-time header earned his Deportivo La Coruna side a 1-1 draw at Almeria. Five keepers had previously found the net in Spain's top flight: Jose Luis Chilavert, Juan Santamaria, Carlos Alberto Fenoy and Nacho Gonzalez from the penalty spot, and Toni Prats scored with a free-kick.

SWITZERLAND

Hopper to leave Zurich

Grasshopper are set to leave the Swiss capital city after 125 years due to rent and operating costs at the Letzigrund Stadium they share with city rivals Zurich. Club officials said that city authorities refused to reduce their rent.

Grasshopper are now exploring possibilities of sharing with clubs in either Aarau or Emmen.

51 games it took Cristiano Ronaldo to score 50 goals for Real Madrid in La Liga – the fastest half-century in the club's history

Feb 18: Uniao Leiria 0 Guimaraes 1.
Feb 19: Portimonense 1 Olhanense 1.
Feb 20: Academica 0 Rio Ave 1; Setubal 1 Naval 1; Maritimo 1 Beira Mar 0; Braga 1 Pacos Ferreira 2.
Feb 21: Sporting 0 Benfica 2.
Feb 25: Guimaraes 0 Academica 2.
Feb 26: Pacos Ferreira 2 Setubal 0; Olhanense 0 Porto 3.
Feb 27: Rio Ave 1 Uniao Leiria 0; Beira Mar 0 Portimonense 1; Benfica 2 Maritimo 1; Nacional 1 Sporting 0.
Feb 28: Naval 0 Braga 0.

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	21	19	2	0	49	7	59
Benfica	21	17	0	4	44	17	51
Sporting	21	9	6	6	32	25	33
P Ferreira	21	8	8	5	22	22	32
Guimaraes	21	9	5	7	25	26	32
Nacional	21	8	5	8	18	23	29
Braga	21	8	4	9	34	28	28
Uniao Leiria	21	8	4	9	19	25	28
Olhanense	21	6	9	6	19	21	27
Beira Mar	21	5	10	6	23	24	25
Rio Ave	21	6	5	10	21	26	23
Academica	21	6	5	10	27	35	23
Maritimo	21	5	7	9	21	24	22
Setubal	21	4	7	10	17	31	19
Naval	21	3	6	12	18	37	15
Portimonense	21	3	5	13	19	37	14

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

PORTUGUESE CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs

Feb 2: Porto 0 Benfica 2.
Feb 3: Guimaraes 1 Academica 0.

2nd legs - April 19/20

ROMANIA

Feb 25: Pandurii 0 Otelul 3; Rapid 1 Urziceni 0.
Feb 26: Sportul 0 Dinamo 1; Timisoara 3 Gaz Metan 1.
Feb 27: Univ Cluj 1 Brasov 1; Victoria 1 CFR 1; Univ Craiova 0 Steaua 1.
Feb 28: Tirgu-Mures 0 Vaslui 2; Astra 1 Gloria 0.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Otelul	19	13	3	3	26	14	42
Timisoara	19	9	10	0	33	22	37
Vaslui	19	10	5	4	27	18	35
Rapid	19	9	6	4	29	12	33
Dinamo	19	9	5	5	41	31	32
Steaua	19	9	5	5	26	16	32
Gaz Metan	19	8	6	5	24	19	30
CFR	19	7	7	5	31	25	28
Astra	19	5	9	5	20	20	24
Brasov	19	4	9	6	17	23	21
Univ Cluj	19	5	6	8	22	34	21
Univ Craiova	19	5	5	9	23	22	20
Gloria	19	5	5	9	21	27	20
Tirgu-Mures	19	5	5	9	19	30	20
Victoria	19	4	7	8	25	33	19
Pandurii	19	4	6	9	17	28	18
Urziceni	19	4	6	9	12	23	18
Sportul	19	3	1	15	19	35	10

34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

SCOTLAND

Regular season

Feb 1: St Johnstone 2 Hamilton 0; Aberdeen 0 Celtic 3.
Feb 2: Rangers 1 Hearts 0; Motherwell 0 Kilmarnock 1; Hibernian 2 St Mirren 0.
Feb 12: Hamilton 0 Hearts 2; Hibernian 2 Kilmarnock 1; Rangers 6 Motherwell 0; St Mirren 3 Inverness 3.
Feb 13: Dundee United 1 Celtic 3.
Feb 15: Aberdeen 1 Motherwell 2.
Feb 19: Aberdeen 5 Kilmarnock 0; Hearts 2 Dundee United 1; Inverness 2 St Johnstone 0; Motherwell 1 Hamilton 0.
Feb 20: Celtic 3 Rangers 0; St Mirren 0 Hibernian 1.
Feb 22: St Johnstone 0 Dundee United 0; Aberdeen 1 Hamilton 0.
Feb 23: Motherwell 0 St Mirren 1.
Feb 26: Aberdeen 0 Hearts 0; Hamilton 1 Dundee United 1; Hibernian 2 Inverness 0; Kilmarnock 2 St Mirren 0.
Feb 27: Motherwell 2 Celtic 0; Rangers 4 St Johnstone 0.

SCOTLAND – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	27	20	4	3	59	17	64
Rangers	25	19	2	4	57	23	59
Hearts	27	17	4	6	41	22	55
Kilmarnock	27	11	6	10	40	33	39
Motherwell	28	11	4	13	31	35	37
Inverness	27	8	9	10	36	35	33
Dundee Utd	24	7	10	7	28	31	31
Aberdeen	27	9	3	15	30	44	30
St Johnstone	26	8	6	12	17	33	30
Hibernian	27	8	4	15	28	43	28
St Mirren	27	5	7	15	22	44	22
Hamilton	26	2	9	15	15	44	15

33-round regular season (11x3); top 6 will form championship group; bottom 6 will form relegation group (1 of them will go down)

SERBIA

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	15	13	1	1	41	11	40
Red Star	15	11	2	2	21	8	35
Vojvodina	15	9	5	1	23	5	32
Rad	15	8	4	3	21	9	28
S Sevojno	15	6	5	4	19	17	23
Spartak	15	5	6	4	15	12	21
Javor	15	5	6	4	12	12	21
Smederevo	15	4	8	3	16	15	20
Jagodina	15	5	5	5	13	13	20
OFK	15	5	4	6	13	13	19
BSK	15	4	5	6	10	20	17
Indjija	15	3	4	8	13	21	13
Borac	15	2	7	6	7	18	13
Metalac	15	2	3	10	9	25	9
Hajduk	15	1	5	9	9	20	8
Cukaricki	15	0	4	11	5	28	4

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SLOVAKIA

Feb 25: Spartak 1 Slovan 3.
Feb 26: Dubnica 0 Kosice 0; Tatran 2 Zilina 0; Senica 3 Dukla 0; Ruzomberok 1 Nitra 0; DAC 2 Zlate Moravce 1.

SLOVAKIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zilina	19	10	7	2	38	18	37
Senica	19	10	4	5	25	19	34
Dukla	19	8	6	5	23	15	30
Spartak	19	7	8	4	23	12	29
Slovan	19	7	7	5	31	18	28
DAC	19	7	6	6	18	17	27
Zlate Moravce	19	6	6	7	21	22	24
Ruzomberok	19	6	5	8	15	22	23
Nitra	19	6	4	9	15	27	22
Tatran	19	5	5	9	14	22	20
Kosice	19	4	6	9	18	27	18
Dubnica	19	4	4	11	13	35	16

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated

SLOVENIA

Feb 20: Celje 0 Domzale 0.
Feb 22: Olimpija 2 Rudar 2.
Feb 26: Rudar 2 Maribor 4; Nafta 1 Primorje 2; Domzale 1 Koper 2; Gorica 1 Olimpija 3.
Feb 27: Triglav 0 Celje 0.

SLOVENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maribor	20	14	6	0	40	10	48
Domzale	20	11	4	5	29	16	37
Koper	20	10	3	7	32	26	33
Rudar	20	6	7	7	33	33	25
Nafta	20	7	4	9	30	32	25
Olimpija	20	6	6	8	26	26	24
Gorica	20	6	5	9	21	31	23
Triglav	20	5	6	9	20	36	21
Celje	20	4	7	9	26	35	19
Primorje	20	5	4	11	27	39	19

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

SPAIN

Saturday, February 5

Almeria 3 (Marcelo Silva 4, Uche 7, Bernardello 17)
Espanyol 2 (Verdu 34, Alvaro 48) Att: 9,300

Athletic Bilbao 3 (David Lopez pen 15, Toquero 26, Llorente 74)
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 39,000

Barcelona 3 (Messi 17, 27, 78)
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 84,766

Getafe 4 (Colunga 18, 25, Miku 44, Pedro Rios 57)
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Riki pen 67) Att: 10,000

Osasuna 1 (Flano 8)
Mallorca 1 (Castro 36) Att: 15,403

Villarreal 0
Levante 1 (Valdo 48) Att: 16,000

Zaragoza 1 (Boutahar 39)
Racing Santander 1 (Christian 14) Att: 22,000

Sunday, February 6

Real Madrid 4 (Kaka 7, Cristiano Ronaldo 21, 41, Adebayor 89)
Real Sociedad 1 (Arbeloa og 72) Att: 70,000

Sevilla 0
Malaga 0 Att: 40,000

Valencia 2 (Aduriz 42, Tino Costa 53)
Hercules 0 Att: 40,000

Saturday, February 12

Atletico Madrid 1 (Reyes 3)
Valencia 2 (Joaquin 41, 86) Att: 40,000

Racing Santander 3 (Christian 12, Rakitic og 19, Arana 90+1)
Sevilla 2 (Fazio 40, Luis Fabiano pen 82) Att: 14,054

Sporting Gijon 1 (Barral 15)
Barcelona 1 (Villa 80) Att: 28,000

Sunday, February 12

Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Lopo 60)
Villarreal 0 Att: 14,000

Espanyol 0
Real Madrid 1 (Marcelo 23) Att: 39,000

Hercules 2 (Farinos 79, Trezeguet 88)
Zaragoza 1 (Braulio 3) Att: 20,000

Levante 1 (Caicedo 53)
Almeria 0 Att: 12,000

Malaga 2 (Julio Baptista pen 80, Rondon 90+4)
Getafe 2 (Miku 7, Colunga 23) Att: 25,000

Real Sociedad 1 (Tamudo 73)
Osasuna 0 Att: 28,000

Monday, February 14

Mallorca 1 (Webo 11)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 11,600

Saturday, February 19

Real Madrid 2 (Benzema 5, Ricardo Carvalho 41)
Levante 0 Att: 65,000

Valencia 0
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 40,000

Zaragoza 0
Atletico Madrid 1 (Aguero 66) Att: 17,000

Sunday, February 20

Almeria 1 (Piatti 47)
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Aranzubia 90+5) Att: 10,000

Barcelona 2 (Villa 3, Messi 78)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Iraola pen 49) Att: 83,533

Getafe 0
Racing Santander 1 (Pinillos pen 87) Att: 8,000

Osasuna 4 (Nekounam 13, pen 55, Lolo 79, Soriano 88)
Espanyol 0 Att: 18,000

Sevilla 1 (Rakitic 21)
Hercules 0 Att: 38,000

Villarreal 1 (Ruben 36)
Malaga 1 (Fernandez 81) Att: 20,000

Monday, February 21

Real Sociedad 1 (Tamudo 55)
Mallorca 0 Att: 20,000

Saturday, February 26

Atletico Madrid 2 (Koke 47, Reyes 75)
Sevilla 2 (Negredo 40, Rakitic 65) Att: 48,000

Deportivo La Coruna 0
Real Madrid 0 Att: 34,600

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TURKEY

Cenk's great start

Cenk Tosun's double in Gaziantepspor's 4-1 triumph at reigning league champions Bursaspor made it six goals in his first five games in Turkish football for the 19-year-old who was signed from Eintracht Frankfurt in January. Although he has been capped by Germany at all levels up to Under-21, Cenk is now set to be fast-tracked into Turkey's national side.

Gaziantepspor have won all four league games in which he has played.

6 second-half goals in Ankaragucu's 4-2 loss at home to Genclerbirligi

Independiente...Facundo Parra

ARGENTINA

Best yet for boss

Independiente coach Antonio Mohamed called his side's 3-0 victory over Uruguayan side Penarol in their opening Libertadores Cup group game the "best performance since I took the reins".

Estudiantes did not make quite such an impressive start to their Libertadores campaign. The Argentinian champions' 5-0 defeat at the hands of Brazilian club Cruzeiro was their heaviest ever defeat at the competition.

In the clausura, Olimpo are in the unique position of being top of the table and in the overall relegation table, after drawing 3-3 at home to Godoy Cruz.

Meanwhile, Colombian striker Teofilo Gutierrez

CLUB FOOTBALL

Espanyol 4 (Estrada og 41, Sergio Garcia 53, Callejon 80, Javi Marquez 90+1)
Real Sociedad 1 (Estrada 43) Att: 26,400

Mallorca 0
Barcelona 3 (Messi 37, Villa 56, Pedro 65) Att: 21,227

Sporting Gijon 0
Zaragoza 0 Att: 19,000

Sunday, February 27
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Llorente 13)
Valencia 2 (Mata 71, Jonas 80) Att: 35,000

Hercules 0
Getafe 0 Att: 20,000

Levante 2 (Ballesteros 43, Caicedo 50)
Osasuna 1 (Pandiani 40) Att: 11,747

Racing Santander 2 (Nahuelpan 2, Dos Santos 67)
Villarreal 2 (Ruben 65, Nilmar 90+2) Att: 16,385

Monday, February 28
Malaga 3 (Maresca 51, Rondon 77, Juanmi 90+1)
Almeria 1 (Feghouli 7) Att: 30,000

SPAIN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	25	22	2	1	76	13	68
Real Madrid	25	19	4	2	55	19	61
Valencia	25	15	6	4	40	26	51
Villarreal	25	14	5	6	44	26	47
Espanyol	25	13	1	11	34	36	40
Ath Bilbao	25	12	2	11	39	36	38
Sevilla	25	10	5	10	38	40	35
At Madrid	25	10	4	11	35	33	34
R Sociedad	25	11	1	13	36	41	34
Getafe	25	9	5	11	35	38	32
Mallorca	25	9	4	12	25	34	31
R Santander	25	7	8	10	23	35	29
Levante	25	8	3	14	26	37	27
Dep Coruna	25	6	9	10	21	35	27
Hercules	25	7	5	13	24	38	26
Osasuna	25	6	7	12	26	32	25
Sporting Gijon	25	5	10	10	23	31	25
Zaragoza	25	5	9	11	22	37	24
Malaga	25	6	5	14	34	51	23
Almeria	25	4	9	12	25	43	21

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

LEADING GOALSCORERS

26 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
24 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
17 David Villa (Barcelona)
14 Fernando Llorente (Athletic Bilbao)
13 Pedro (Barcelona)
12 Giuseppe Rossi (Villarreal)

SPANISH CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - January 26; 2nd legs - February 2
Barcelona v Almeria 5-0, 3-0 (agg 8-0)
Sevilla v Real Madrid 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)

Final - April 20

SWITZERLAND

Feb 5: Bellinzona 1 Young Boys 5; Zurich 2 Lucerne 0.
Feb 6: Thun 2 Basle 3; St Gallen 1 Grasshopper 4; Xamax 1 Sion 0.
Feb 12: Basle 3 St Gallen 0; Sion 1 Bellinzona 0.
Feb 13: Grasshopper 0 Thun 0; Lucerne 2 Xamax 1; Young Boys 4 Zurich 2.
Feb 19: Xamax 0 Grasshopper 0; Zurich 3 St Gallen 1.
Feb 20: Basle 1 Sion 0; Bellinzona 2 Lucerne 0; Thun 1 Young Boys 1.
Feb 26: Sion 2 Grasshopper 0; Zurich 5 Bellinzona 0.
Feb 27: Lucerne 0 Basle 1; St Gallen 0 Thun 1; Young Boys 3 Xamax 2.

SWITZERLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	22	13	5	4	45	28	44
Zurich	22	11	7	4	46	30	40
Lucerne	22	10	6	6	44	30	36
Young Boys	22	9	8	5	37	31	35
Sion	22	9	6	7	32	20	33
Thun	22	5	13	4	28	25	28
Xamax	22	6	4	12	31	43	22
Bellinzona	22	5	7	10	28	47	22
Grasshopper	22	4	8	10	23	34	20
St Gallen	22	5	2	15	20	46	17

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

TURKEY

Feb 4: Bursaspor 2 Sivasspor 1.
Feb 5: Kasimpasa 1 Istanbul BB 3; Besiktas 1 Karabukspor 1; Kayserispor 2 Ankaragucu 1; Manisaspor 1 Fenerbahce 3.
Feb 6: Konyaspor 0 Gaziantepspor 2; Trabzonspor 0 Antalyaspor 0; Genclerbirligi 1 Bucaspor 0; Galatasaray 4 Eskisehirspor 2.
Feb 12: Bucaspor 3 Konyaspor 2; Sivasspor 2 Trabzonspor 3; Istanbul BB 0 Genclerbirligi 1; Gaziantepspor 1 Galatasaray 0.
Feb 13: Karabukspor 1 Kasimpasa 3; Eskisehirspor 1 Bursaspor 1; Antalyaspor 1 Manisaspor 4; Ankaragucu 1 Besiktas 0.
Feb 14: Fenerbahce 2 Kayserispor 0.
Feb 18: Eskisehirspor 2 Sivasspor 1.
Feb 19: Kasimpasa 2 Ankaragucu 1; Bursaspor 1 Gaziantepspor 4; Genclerbirligi 2 Karabukspor 3; Galatasaray 1 Bucaspor 0.
Feb 20: Kayserispor 2 Antalyaspor 0; Konyaspor 0 Istanbul BB 0; Besiktas 2 Fenerbahce 4.
Feb 21: Manisaspor 1 Trabzonspor 2.
Feb 25: Bucaspor 0 Bursaspor 2.
Feb 26: Ankaragucu 2 Genclerbirligi 4; Istanbul BB 3 Galatasaray 1; Gaziantepspor 2 Eskisehirspor 1; Fenerbahce 2 Kasimpasa 0.
Feb 27: Karabukspor 2 Konyaspor 1; Sivasspor 4 Manisaspor 2; Trabzonspor 3 Kayserispor 3.
Feb 28: Antalyaspor 0 Besiktas 2.

TURKEY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	23	16	3	4	54	24	51
Trabzonspor	23	15	6	2	49	19	51
Bursaspor	23	14	6	3	40	18	48
Kayserispor	23	12	7	4	32	20	43
Gaziantepspor	23	11	7	5	26	18	40
Besiktas	23	10	5	8	36	27	35
Istanbul BB	23	10	3	10	30	25	33
Eskisehirspor	23	8	8	7	25	25	32
Karabukspor	23	9	5	9	37	38	32
Galatasaray	23	10	2	11	26	29	32
Manisaspor	23	10	1	12	37	38	31
Genclerbirligi	23	7	6	10	25	35	27
Ankaragucu	23	6	7	10	31	41	25
Antalyaspor	23	6	7	10	21	32	25
Sivasspor	23	4	7	12	26	43	19
Bucaspor	23	4	6	13	17	34	18
Konyaspor	23	3	7	13	20	35	16
Kasimpasa	23	3	5	15	20	51	14

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

UKRAINE

UKRAINE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar	19	17	1	1	38	7	52
Dynamo	19	12	4	3	35	17	40
Metalist	19	12	2	5	38	19	38
Dnipro	19	10	5	4	27	11	35
Karpaty	19	9	5	5	24	18	32
Volyn	19	8	4	7	20	21	28
Arsenal	19	7	4	8	22	24	25
Vorskla	19	6	5	8	24	22	23
Tavriya	19	6	5	8	30	31	23
Metalurh D	19	6	4	9	21	29	22
Obolon	19	6	4	9	16	24	22
Zorya	19	4	7	8	20	28	19
Kryvbas	19	3	9	7	18	27	18
Illichivets	19	4	6	9	26	45	18
Sevastopol	19	3	5	11	12	32	14
Metalurh Z	19	2	4	13	8	24	10

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - January 25-27; 2nd legs - February 1-3
Alianza Lima (Per) v Jaguares (Mex)
0-2, 0-2 (agg 0-4)
Bolivar (Bol) v Union Espanola (Chl)
0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
Cerro Porteno (Par) v Deportivo Petare (Ven)
1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Corinthians (Bra) v Deportes Tolima (Col)
0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Independiente (Arg) v Deportivo Quito (Ecu)
2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Liverpool (Uru) v Gremio (Bra)
2-2, 1-3 (agg 3-5)

Winners qualified for group stage

Group stage

Group 1

Feb 15
San Luis (Mex) 1 (Cavallo 40)
Libertad (Par) 2 (Pavlovich 18, Aquino pen 56)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Buitrago (Col)
Sent off: Torres (San Luis) 84min

Feb 16
Once Caldas (Col) 0
Universidad San Martin (Per) 3 (Arriola 37, 59, Alemmano 41)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Pezzotta (Arg)

Feb 22
Once Caldas 1 (Moreno 29)
Libertad 1 (Ayala 90)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Laverni (Arg)

Feb 22
Universidad San Martin 2 (Labarthe 84, Marinelli 90)
San Luis 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Seneme (Bra)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Martin	2	2	0	0	5	0	6
Libertad	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Once Caldas	2	0	1	1	1	4	1
San Luis	2	0	0	2	1	4	0

Feb 15 San Luis v Libertad 1-2
Feb 16 Once Caldas v San Martin 0-3
Feb 22 Once Caldas v Libertad 1-1
San Martin v San Luis 2-0
Mar 2 San Luis v Once Caldas
Mar 8 Libertad v San Martin
Mar 15 Once Caldas v San Luis
San Martin v Libertad
Mar 22 Libertad v Once Caldas
San Luis v San Martin
Apr 19 Libertad v San Luis
San Martin v Once Caldas

Group 2

Feb 17
Gremio (Bra) 3 (Douglas pen 43, 70, Gilson 48)
Oriente Petrolero (Bol) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Prudente (Uru)

Feb 17
Leon (Per) 1 (Elias 87)
Atletico Junior (Col) 2 (Viafara 23, Bacca 66)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Gomes Oliveira (Bra)
Sent off: Amaya (Junior) 79min

Feb 23
Leon 1 (Zegarra 35)
Oriente Petrolero 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Escalante (Ven)
Sent off: Gutierrez (Oriente) 90min

Feb 24
Atletico Junior 2 (Hernandez 29, Viafara 74)
Gremio 1 (Borges 5)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Mex)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Junior	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
Gremio	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
Leon	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Oriente	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Feb 17 Gremio v Oriente 3-0
Leon v Junior 1-2
Feb 23 Leon v Oriente 1-0
Feb 24 Junior v Gremio 2-1
Mar 3 Gremio v Leon
Mar 9 Oriente v Junior
Mar 15 Leon v Gremio
Mar 17 Junior v Oriente
Mar 24 Oriente v Leon
Apr 5 Gremio v Junior
Apr 14 Junior v Leon
Oriente v Gremio

Group 3

Feb 9
Fluminense (Bra) 2 (Rafael Moura 58, 74)
Argentinos Juniors (Arg) 2 (Niell 44, 70)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Torres (Par)

Feb 15
America (Mex) 2 (Sanchez 4, Vuoso 48)
Nacional (Uru) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ruiz (Col)

Feb 23
Fluminense 0
Nacional 0
Ref: Amarilla (Par)

Feb 24
Argentinos Juniors 3 (Salcedo pen 45, 73, Sanchez Prette 90)
America 1 (Montenegro 27)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

36 red cards in the Argentinian fifth-tier game between Claypole and Victoriano as every player in each squad was sent off after a brawl

made a stunning full debut for Racing, scoring both goals as his side came from behind to win 2-1 away from home in the clasico against San Lorenzo.

At the bottom of the league, Quilmes remain pointless after a third straight defeat.

BRAZIL

Fla's first half

Ronaldinho scored the only goal of the game as Flamengo beat Boavista to collect the Taca Guanabara title – the first leg of the Rio de Janeiro state championships.

PERU

Libertadores success

Universidad San Martin won away from home in the Libertadores Cup for the first time in eight attempts, beating Once Caldas 3-0 in Colombia with goals from Heber Arriola (two) and Ariel Alemanno. The defeat was Once's first in 22 home games in the competition.

Elsewhere, a Carlos Zegarra goal gave Leon de Huanuco a 1-0 home win over Bolivian giants Oriente Petrolero, their first victory of their maiden Libertadores Cup campaign.

On target...Alemanno (right)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Argentinos	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
America	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Fluminense	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Nacional	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

Feb 9 Fluminense v Argentinos 2-2
Feb 15 America v Nacional 2-0
Feb 23 Fluminense v Nacional 0-0
Feb 24 Argentinos v America 3-1
Mar 2 America v Fluminense
Nacional v Argentinos
Mar 15 Argentinos v Nacional
Mar 23 Fluminense v America
Apr 6 America v Argentinos
Nacional v Fluminense
Apr 20 Argentinos v Fluminense
Nacional v America

Group 4

Feb 15
Velez Sarsfield (Arg) 3 (Moralez 45, Ramirez 61, Martinez pen 84)
Caracas (Ven) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)
Sent off: Pena (Caracas) 12min

Feb 16
Union Espanola (Chl) 2 (Monje 48, Leal pen 90)
Universidad Catolica (Chl) 2 (Pratto 68, Meneses 73)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Puga (Chl)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Univ Catolica	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Espanola	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Caracas	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

Feb 15 Velez v Caracas 3-0
Feb 16 Espanola v Catolica 2-2
Mar 3 Caracas v Espanola
Velez v Catolica
Mar 9 Catolica v Caracas
Mar 10 Espanola v Velez
Mar 22 Caracas v Catolica
Mar 24 Velez v Espanola
Apr 7 Catolica v Velez
Espanola v Caracas
Apr 14 Caracas v Velez
Catolica v Espanola

Group 5

Feb 15
Deportivo Tachira (Ven) 0
Santos (Bra) 0
Ref: Vera (Ecu)

Feb 17
Cerro Porteno (Par) 5 (Nanni 2, pen 69, Dos Santos 7, Iturbe 47, 86)
Colo Colo (Chl) 2 (Jorquera 13, Paredes 74)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Lopes (Bra)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	1	1	0	0	5	2	3
Dep Tachira	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Santos	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Colo Colo	1	0	0	1	2	5	0

Feb 15 Tachira v Santos 0-0
Feb 17 Cerro Porteno v Colo Colo 5-2
Mar 1 Tachira v Colo Colo
Mar 2 Santos v Cerro Porteno
Mar 10 Cerro Porteno v Tachira
Mar 16 Colo Colo v Santos
Apr 5 Tachira v Cerro Porteno
Apr 6 Santos v Colo Colo
Apr 12 Colo Colo v Tachira
Apr 13 Cerro Porteno v Santos
Apr 20 Colo Colo v Cerro Porteno
Santos v Tachira

Group 6

Feb 16
Emelec (Ecu) 1 (Gimenez 90)
Internacional (Bra) 1 (Bolatti 79)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

Feb 16
Jaguares (Mex) 2 (Salazar 66, Esqueda 79)
Jorge Wilstermann (Bol) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Soto (Ven)

Feb 22
Emelec 1 (Morante 34)
Jorge Wilstermann 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Osorio (Chl)

Feb 23
Internacional 4 (Bolatti 20, 44, Leandro Damiao 66, Oscar 90)
Jaguares 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)
Sent off: Rodriguez (Jaguares) 90min

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Internacional	2	1	1	0	5	1	4
Emelec	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Jaguares	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Wilstermann	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

Feb 16 Emelec v Internacional 1-1
Jaguares v Wilstermann 2-0
Feb 22 Emelec v Wilstermann 1-0
Feb 23 Internacional v Jaguares 4-0
Mar 8 Jaguares v Emelec
Mar 16 Emelec v Jaguares
Wilstermann v Internacional
Mar 30 Internacional v Wilstermann
Apr 6 Jaguares v Internacional
Apr 7 Wilstermann v Emelec
Apr 19 Internacional v Emelec
Wilstermann v Jaguares

Group 7

Feb 15
Deportes Tolima (Col) 1 (Santoya 83)
Guarani (Par) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ponce (Ecu)

Feb 16
Cruzeiro (Bra) 5 (Wallyson 1, 82, Roger 18, Montillo 39, 59)
Estudiantes de La Plata (Arg) 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)

Feb 22
Cruzeiro 4 (Wallyson 30, 64, Farias 86, Thiago Ribeiro 89)
Guarani 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Orozco (Bol)

Feb 23
Estudiantes de La Plata 1 (Barrientos 45)
Deportes Tolima 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco (Uru)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruzeiro	2	2	0	0	9	0	6
Tolima	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Estudiantes	2	1	0	1	1	5	3
Guarani	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Feb 15 Tolima v Guarani 1-0
Feb 16 Cruzeiro v Estudiantes 5-0
Feb 22 Cruzeiro v Guarani 4-0
Feb 23 Estudiantes v Tolima 1-0
Mar 2 Tolima v Cruzeiro
Mar 9 Guarani v Estudiantes
Mar 16 Cruzeiro v Tolima
Mar 17 Estudiantes v Guarani
Mar 30 Guarani v Cruzeiro
Tolima v Estudiantes
Apr 13 Estudiantes v Cruzeiro
Guarani v Tolima

Group 8

Feb 17
Godoy Cruz (Arg) 2 (C Sanchez 17, N Sanchez 60)
LDU Quito (Ecu) 1 (Reasco 53)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (Uru)
Sent off: Hidalgo (LDU) 90min

Feb 24
Independiente (Arg) 3 (Parra 47, Pellerano 70, Silvera 85)
Penarol (Uru) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Fagundes (Bra)

LIBERTADORES CUP – GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Independiente	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Godoy Cruz	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
LDU Quito	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Penarol	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

Feb 17 Godoy Cruz v LDU 2-1
Feb 24 Independiente v Penarol 3-0
Mar 1 Godoy Cruz v Penarol
Mar 3 LDU v Independiente
Mar 9 Penarol v LDU
Mar 10 Independiente v Godoy Cruz
Mar 17 LDU v Penarol
Mar 23 Godoy Cruz v Independiente
Mar 31 Penarol v Godoy Cruz
Apr 5 Independiente v LDU
Apr 12 LDU v Godoy Cruz
Penarol v Independiente

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

ARGENTINA

Apertura

Sunday, February 6
Independiente 0
Tigre 1 (Stracqualursi 79)

ARGENTINA – APERTURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Estudiantes	19	14	3	2	32	8	45
Velez	19	13	4	2	33	9	43
Arsenal	19	9	5	5	22	19	32
River Plate	19	8	7	4	21	18	31
Godoy Cruz	19	7	8	4	32	25	29
Racing Club	19	8	5	6	25	18	29
Lanus	19	8	4	7	20	25	28
All Boys	19	7	5	7	24	23	26
Newell's	19	6	8	5	13	12	26
Colon	19	7	5	7	21	29	26
Tigre	19	7	4	8	24	24	25
Boca Juniors	19	7	4	8	20	20	25
Argentinos	19	6	6	7	22	21	24
San Lorenzo	19	6	6	7	18	20	24
Banfield	19	4	8	7	20	19	20
Quilmes	19	4	7	8	14	23	19
Olimpo	19	5	3	11	18	26	18
Huracan	19	4	4	11	16	33	16
Gimnasia LP	19	3	6	10	13	23	15
Independiente	19	2	8	9	13	26	14

No relegation after apertura

TOP GOALSCORERS
11 Santiago Silva (Velez Sarsfield)
11 Denis Stracqualursi (Tigre)
10 Juan Manuel Martinez (Velez Sarsfield)
8 Mauro Matos (All Boys)
8 Martin Palermo (Boca Juniors)
8 David Ramirez (Godoy Cruz)

Clausura

Friday, February 11
Estudiantes 2 (Fernandez 13, Mercado 24)
Newell's Old Boys 1 (Cobelli 90)

Independiente 2 (Parra 7, Battion 36)
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Moralez 47, Martinez 78)

Saturday, February 12
Colon 2 (Fuertes 51, 71)
Quilmes 0

Olimpo 2 (Vega 64, Salom 90)
Banfield 1 (Lopez 48)

San Lorenzo 1 (Menseguez 17)
Gimnasia La Plata 1 (Neira pen 70)

Sunday, February 13
All Boys 0
Racing Club 1 (Hauche 74)

Boca Juniors 1 (Erviti 53)
Godoy Cruz 4 (Ramirez 14, 38, Torres 52, Sanchez 90+3)

Tigre 0
River Plate 0

Monday, February 14
Huracan 1 (Campora pen 3)
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Blandi 89)

Lanus 3 (Valeri 56, Regueiro 90+1, Romero 90+4)
Arsenal 1 (Caffa 84)

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URUGUAY

Surprise starts

The apertura got under way with champions Defensor beating River Plate 4-1 on the opening day of the season. The biggest shock of the opening weekend occurred when Miramar Misiones, who were lying bottom in the relegation places (decided by the complicated format of points over the last four tournaments), beat Penarol 3-0 at the Estadio Centenario.

In the second week it was Central Espanol's Cristian Palacios who stole the headlines with a hat-trick in a 5-1 win away to Cerro.

Central lead the table from Tacuarembo, who have already got more points this term than in the whole of last year's apertura.

Top...Pumas' Martin Bravo (left)

MEXICO

Pumas still unbeaten

Pumas are the only remaining unbeaten team in the clausura as their 5-1 win over Tecos stretched their run to eight league games without defeat this season. Israel Castro, Dario Veron, Javier Cortes, Dante Lopez and Carlos Orrantia were on target for Pumas, with Israel Lopez replying for Tecos, who also had Gustavo Cabral sent off for a second yellow card with 21 minutes to go.

PUERTO RICO

Islanders join NASL

Three-times CONCACAF Champions League qualifiers Puerto Rico Islanders will compete in the revived North American Soccer League this year.

CLUB FOOTBALL

Friday, February 18
Banfield 1 (Achucarro 6)
Colon 1 (Fuertes 45)

Gimnasia La Plata 1 (Cordoba 66)
Olimpo 3 (Dominguez 49, Maggiolo 71, Rolle 76)

Saturday, February 19
Argentinos Juniors 0
Independiente 0

Newell's Old Boys 2 (Bieler 46, Cobelli 88)
Lanus 1 (Valeri 69)

Racing Club 0
Boca Juniors 1 (Mouche 47)

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Ramirez 55)
All Boys 2 (Grazzini 25, 57)

Sunday, February 20
Quilmes 0
Estudiantes 1 (Mercado 45)

River Plate 2 (Lamela 51, Ferrari 59)
Huracan 0

Monday, February 21
Arsenal 2 (Lopez 5, Ortiz 86)
Tigre 0

Godoy Cruz 0
San Lorenzo 2 (Menseguez 50, Benitez 90+3)

Friday, February 25
Colon 1 (Graciani 8)
Gimnasia La Plata 3 (Neira 6, 25, Castro 90+1)

Olimpo 3 (Maggiolo 17, Bareiro 33, 90+4)
Godoy Cruz 3 (Navarro 52, Nunez 56, 66)

Saturday, February 26
Boca Juniors 0
All Boys 0

Lanus 2 (Valeri 8, 38)
Quilmes 1 (Garnier 34)

San Lorenzo 1 (Bottinelli 11)
Racing Club 2 (Gutierrez 44, 55)

Sunday, February 27
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Niell 68)
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Ramirez 8)

Estudiantes 0
Banfield 1 (Achucarro 61)

Independiente 0
River Plate 1 (Pavone 89)

Monday, February 28
Huracan 1 (Campora 52)
Arsenal 1 (Obolo 64)

Tigre 1 (Stracqualursi 8)
Newell's Old Boys 0

ARGENTINA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpo	3	2	1	0	8	5	7
River Plate	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Lanus	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Estudiantes	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Racing Club	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Godoy Cruz	3	1	1	1	7	6	4
San Lorenzo	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Gimnasia LP	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Arsenal	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Colon	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Banfield	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
All Boys	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Tigre	3	1	1	1	1	2	4
Boca Juniors	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
Argentinos	3	0	3	0	2	2	3
Newell's	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Velez	3	0	2	1	4	5	2
Independiente	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Huracan	3	0	2	1	2	4	2
Quilmes	3	0	0	3	1	5	0

19-round tournament (19x1); the 2 teams with the worst average points over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated; the teams with 3rd and 4th worst averages enter rel/prom play-offs

LEADING GOALSCORERS

4 Diego Valeri (Lanus)
3 Esteban Fuertes (Colon)
3 Juan Neira (Gimnasia La Plata)

BOLIVIA

Adecuacion*

Feb 5: Real Potosi 1 La Paz 0; Universitario 3 Guabira 1.
Feb 6: The Strongest 1 Mamore 0; San Jose 3 Bolivar 2; Aurora 3 Nacional 1; Blooming 0 Oriente 2.
Feb 12: Bolivar 1 Aurora 1.
Feb 13: La Paz 1 The Strongest 1; Nacional 2 Universitario 0; Guabira 2 Real Potosi 1; Mamore 2 Blooming 1; Oriente 2 San Jose 1.
Feb 18: Nacional 4 Guabira 1.
Feb 19: Blooming 3 La Paz 0; San Jose 2 Mamore 1.
Feb 20: The Strongest 2 Real Potosi 1; Aurora 3 Oriente 2; Universitario 0 Bolivar 1.
Feb 23: La Paz 1 San Jose 0; Real Potosi 3 Blooming 1; Guabira 1 The Strongest 0.
Feb 24: Bolivar 0 Nacional 0; Mamore 1 Aurora 1.
Feb 26: San Jose 2 Real Potosi 1.
Feb 27: Blooming 1 The Strongest 1; Nacional 2 Oriente 1; Bolivar 3 Guabira 2; Aurora 3 La Paz 2; Universitario 2 Mamore 1.

BOLIVIA – ADECUACION*

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Oriente	7	5	0	2	19	8	15
Bolivar	8	4	3	1	11	6	15
Aurora	8	4	3	1	15	11	15
Nacional	8	4	1	3	15	10	13
San Jose	8	4	1	3	11	12	13
The Strongest	8	3	3	2	11	10	12
Guabira	8	4	0	4	13	14	12
Blooming	8	3	1	4	9	9	10
Universitario	7	3	0	4	9	10	9
Real Potosi	8	3	0	5	9	14	9
La Paz	8	2	1	5	7	17	7
Mamore	8	1	1	6	6	14	4

22-round tournament (11x2); no relegation after adecuacion

**The adecuacion is a transitional tournament, to allow Bolivia to run its league on a European winter-like calendar, i.e. from the European autumn to the European spring*

CHILE

Apertura

Regular season

Feb 4: Univ Catolica 3 Audax Italiano 1.
Feb 5: Cobresal 3 Huachipato 2; Wanderers 2 Colo Colo 1; Univ Concepcion 0 La Serena 0; Univ Chile 3 Nublense 1.
Feb 6: Cobreloa 0 Iquique 0; Morning 2 O'Higgins 4; Palestino 1 Espanola 2; La Calera 1 San Felipe 0.
Feb 11: Espanola 2 Wanderers 1.
Feb 12: La Calera 2 Univ Catolica 1; La Serena 0 Morning 0; Colo Colo 1 Univ Concepcion 5; Iquique 1 San Felipe 1; Huachipato 3 Nublense 1.
Feb 13: Cobreloa 1 Univ Chile 4; Audax Italiano 3 Cobresal 2.
Feb 18: La Serena 2 Audax Italiano 3; Wanderers 1 Palestino 1; Nublense 2 O'Higgins 3.
Feb 19: Cobresal 3 La Calera 1; Morning 3 Iquique 1; Univ Concepcion 0 Cobreloa 1; Univ Catolica 2 Huachipato 1.
Feb 20: San Felipe 2 Colo Colo 0; Univ Chile 2 Espanola 1.
Feb 22: O'Higgins 2 Univ Catolica 3; Nublense 2 Cobreloa 1; La Calera 2 La Serena 0.
Feb 23: Palestino 0 Colo Colo 3; Audax Italiano 2 San Felipe 1; Huachipato 3 Wanderers 1; Iquique 1 Univ Concepcion 3.
Feb 24: Espanola 3 Cobresal 0; Univ Chile 1 Morning 2.
Feb 25: La Serena 1 O'Higgins 2.
Feb 26: Univ Catolica 1 Wanderers 1.
Feb 27: Univ Concepcion 1 Univ Chile 5; Cobreloa 0 La Calera 1; Morning 2 Audax Italiano 2; Cobresal 2 Palestino 1; San Felipe 1 Espanola 1; Iquique 2 Nublense 1.

CHILE – APERTURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Chile	6	4	1	1	16	7	13
Univ Catolica	6	4	1	1	12	7	13
La Calera	6	4	1	1	8	5	13
Espanola	6	3	1	2	9	7	10
Cobresal	6	3	1	2	12	12	10
Audax Italiano	6	3	1	2	12	13	10
Huachipato	5	3	0	2	10	7	9
O'Higgins	5	3	0	2	12	11	9
Morning	6	2	3	1	10	9	9
San Felipe	6	2	2	2	8	6	8
U Concepcion	6	2	1	3	9	9	7
Cobreloa	6	2	1	3	5	7	7
Nublense	6	2	0	4	9	12	6
Wanderers	6	1	2	3	6	10	5
Iquique	6	1	2	3	5	10	5
Palestino	5	1	1	3	6	9	4
Colo Colo	5	1	1	3	7	11	4
La Serena	6	0	3	3	4	8	3

17-round regular season (17x1); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

COLOMBIA

Apertura

Regular season

Feb 5: Cartagena 4 Junior 2; Chico 1 Once Caldas 1; Tolima 1 Indep Santa Fe 0.
Feb 6: Millonarios 2 Huila 3; Quindio 2 America 0; Dep Cali 1 Cucuta 2; Itagui 2 Indep Medellin 1; Nacional 2 Envigado 3.
Feb 11: Junior 1 Tolima 0.
Feb 12: La Equidad 1 Nacional 1; Once Caldas 2 Dep Cali 0.
Feb 13: Indep Santa Fe 0 Quindio 1; Envigado 2 Itagui 2; America 3 Pereira 2; Huila 3 Cartagena 0; Indep Medellin 1 Chico 0; Cucuta 0 Millonarios 1.
Feb 17: Pereira 0 La Equidad 1.
Feb 18: Tolima 3 Huila 1.
Feb 19: Millonarios 0 Once Caldas 2; Nacional 3 America 1.
Feb 20: Chico 1 Itagui 2; Cartagena 1 Cucuta 1; Quindio 1 Junior 1; Pereira 1 Indep Santa Fe 1; Envigado 0 La Equidad 0; Dep Cali 0 Indep Medellin 2.
Feb 26: America 2 Envigado 1; Indep Medellin 3 Millonarios 3; Once Caldas 3 Cartagena 2.
Feb 27: Indep Santa Fe 0 Nacional 0; Itagui 2 La Equidad 1; Huila 0 Quindio 1; Cucuta 2 Tolima 3; Chico 2 Dep Cali 0; Junior 2 Pereira 1.

COLOMBIA – APERTURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Once Caldas	4	3	1	0	8	3	10
Quindio	4	3	1	0	5	1	10
Itagui	4	3	1	0	8	5	10
Tolima	4	3	0	1	7	4	9
Ind Medellin	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Junior	4	2	1	1	6	6	7
Huila	4	2	0	2	7	6	6
America	4	2	0	2	6	8	6
Nacional	4	1	2	1	6	5	5
Envigado	4	1	2	1	6	6	5
La Equidad	4	1	2	1	3	3	5
Chico	4	1	1	2	4	4	4
Cucuta	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Cartagena	4	1	1	2	7	9	4
Millonarios	4	1	1	2	6	8	4
Ind Santa Fe	4	0	2	2	1	3	2
Pereira	4	0	1	3	4	7	1
Dep Cali	4	0	0	4	1	8	0

18-round regular season (17x1, plus 1 round of "clasicos"); top 8 enter championship play-offs; no relegation after apertura

ECUADOR

1st stage

Feb 5: El Nacional 0 Dep Quito 3; Manta 0 Olmedo 0; Imbabura 2 Independiente 2.
Feb 6: LDU Quito 3 Barcelona 0; Cuenca 2 Espoli 1; Emelec 3 LDU Loja 2.
Feb 11: LDU Loja 0 Cuenca 0.
Feb 12: Barcelona 1 Manta 1.
Feb 13: Dep Quito 0 Emelec 0; Independiente 1 Espoli 1; Olmedo 0 El Nacional 4; Imbabura 1 LDU Quito 1.
Feb 16: Espoli 1 LDU Loja 2; Cuenca 1 Dep Quito 1; El Nacional 0 Barcelona 0.
Feb 17: Manta 2 Imbabura 0.
Feb 19: Independiente 1 LDU Loja 0.
Feb 20: LDU Quito 5 Manta 0; Dep Quito 3 Espoli 2; Imbabura 0 El Nacional 1; Olmedo 0 Cuenca 0.
Feb 23: LDU Quito 2 Independiente 1.
Feb 26: Emelec 1 Imbabura 0; LDU Loja 1 Dep Quito 0.
Feb 27: Cuenca 1 Barcelona 1; Espoli 1 Olmedo 2; El Nacional 1 LDU Quito 2; Manta 2 Independiente 0.

ECUADOR – 1ST STAGE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU Quito	6	4	1	1	13	4	13
Dep Quito	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Emelec	4	3	1	0	6	3	10
Cuenca	6	2	4	0	6	4	10
LDU Loja	6	3	1	2	7	6	10
Manta	6	2	2	2	6	8	8
Olmedo	5	2	2	1	3	5	8
El Nacional	6	2	1	3	7	7	7
Barcelona	5	1	3	1	3	5	6
Independiente	6	1	2	3	6	9	5
Imbabura	6	0	2	4	3	8	2
Espoli	6	0	1	5	7	12	1

22-round tournament (11x2); no relegation after 1st stage

Bound for the USA...Islanders

MALAWI

Escom triumph

Escom United were crowned Super League champions when a 2-1 win over Moyale Barracks ensured their first title since 2007.

MAURITANIA

History makers

Tevragh Zeina became the first Mauritanian side to win a game in the continent's secondary continental-club competition as they beat Real Bamako 1-0 in Mali with a goal from Ely Cheikh Ould Voulani to reach the first round of the CAF Confederation Cup.

MOROCCO

Raja romp home

Raja Casablanca thrashed Chadian visitors Tourbillon 10-1 to equal the record winning margin for an African Champions League game. Kabwe Warriors of Zambia beat Majantja of Lesotho 9-0 in 1972 when the competition was called the African Champions Cup.

SOUTH AFRICA

All square in Soweto

A last-minute goal from Thulasize Mbuyane earned Orlando Pirates a 1-1 draw against Kaizer Chiefs in the Soweto derby to keep them top of the Premier Soccer League from Ajax Cape Town on goal difference.

Mbuyane got married the previous week, but postponed his honeymoon with the league in full swing. Kaizer Motaung, the son of the Chiefs' chairman, had opened the scoring in the first half.

PARAGUAY

Apertura

Feb 5: Sol de America 0 Libertad 1; Guarani 2 Nacional 2.
Feb 6: Caballero 0 3 de Febrero 0; Luqueno 2 Rubio Nu 2; Independiente 0 Olimpia 3.
Feb 7: Cerro Porteno 1 Tacuary 1.
Feb 10: Libertad 2 Luqueno 1.
Feb 11: Tacuary 0 Guarani 0; 3 de Febrero 0 Sol de America 1.
Feb 12: Nacional 1 Independiente 0; Olimpia 3 Caballero 1.
Feb 13: Rubio Nu 2 Cerro Porteno 2.
Feb 15: Tacuary 0 Nacional 1.
Feb 16: Caballero 1 Independiente 2; Sol de America 0 Olimpia 4; Luqueno 2 3 de Febrero 1.
Feb 19: Nacional 3 Caballero 1.
Feb 20: Independiente 1 Sol de America 1; Rubio Nu 0 Tacuary 1; 3 de Febrero 1 Cerro Porteno 2; Olimpia 5 Luqueno 0.
Feb 26: Cerro Porteno 1 Olimpia 2.
Feb 27: Rubio Nu 0 Nacional 0; Sol de America 1 Caballero 2; Guarani 1 3 de Febrero 0; Luqueno 1 Independiente 1; Tacuary 1 Libertad 0.

PARAGUAY – APERTURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	6	6	0	0	19	3	18
Nacional	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
Tacuary	6	3	2	1	6	4	11
Libertad	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Rubio Nu	5	1	3	1	5	5	6
Guarani	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Cerro Porteno	4	1	2	1	6	6	5
Independiente	6	1	2	3	6	10	5
Luqueno	6	1	2	3	8	14	5
3 de Febrero	6	1	1	4	5	8	4
Caballero	6	1	1	4	5	11	4
Sol America	6	1	1	4	3	9	4

22-round tournament (11x2); no relegation after apertura

PERU

Regular season

Feb 12: Inti Gas 1 Leon 0; Universitario 0 Juan Aurich 0; Cobresol 0 San Martin 0.
Feb 13: Cienciano 1 Huancayo 0; Alianza Lima 4 Comercio 1; Cristal 1 Melgar 2; Alianza Atletico 1 Sport Boys 2; Cesar Vallejo 3 CNI 0.
Feb 19: Huancayo 2 Inti Gas 2; CNI 1 Universitario 1; San Martin 2 Cesar Vallejo 1; Sport Boys 0 Cristal 1; Alianza Lima 1 Alianza Atletico 0.
Feb 20: Melgar 0 Cienciano 4; Leon 0 Cobresol 1; Juan Aurich 3 Comercio 2.
Feb 25: Universitario 1 San Martin 0.
Feb 26: Cristal 1 Alianza Lima 1; Inti Gas 2 Melgar 0.
Feb 27: Cesar Vallejo 0 Leon 1; Comercio 2 Alianza Atletico 0; Juan Aurich 2 CNI 2; Cobresol 0 Huancayo 0; Cienciano 3 Sport Boys 0.

PERU – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cienciano	3	3	0	0	8	0	9
Alianza Lima	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Inti Gas	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Juan Aurich	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Universitario	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Cobresol	3	1	2	0	1	0	5
Cristal	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
San Martin	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Cesar Vallejo	3	1	0	2	4	3	3
Leon	3	1	0	2	1	2	3
Comercio	3	1	0	2	5	7	3
Sport Boys	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Melgar	3	1	0	2	2	7	3
Huancayo	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
CNI	3	0	2	1	3	6	2
Al Atletico	3	0	0	3	1	5	0

30-round regular season; top 2 will then meet in play-off games to decide the champions

URUGUAY

Clausura

Feb 5: Danubio 1 Cerro 0; Tacuarembo 3 Fenix 0; Nacional 1 Wanderers 1; Defensor 4 River Plate 1.
Feb 6: Bella Vista 1 Central Espanol 1; Rampla 1 Liverpool 1; Racing 2 El Tanque Sisley 1; Miramar Misiones 3 Penarol 0.
Feb 11: Fenix 2 Nacional 1.
Feb 12: Liverpool 1 Defensor 2; Miramar Misiones 1 Racing 1.
Feb 13: River Plate 1 Rampla 2; Bella Vista 4 Danubio 1; El Tanque Sisley 0 Tacuarembo 1; Cerro 1 Central Espanol 5; Wanderers 1 Penarol 2.
Feb 19: Central Espanol 2 River Plate 0; Tacuarembo 2 Wanderers 1; Penarol 1 Fenix 1.
Feb 20: Racing 1 Liverpool 1; Cerro 2 Defensor 1; Danubio 5 Miramar Misiones 2; Rampla 1 Bella Vista 0.
Feb 26: Fenix 1 Danubio 0; Miramar Misiones 0 Central Espanol 1; Cerro 1 Rampla 1.
Feb 27: Wanderers 0 Defensor 1; Liverpool 3 Tacuarembo 0; River Plate 1 Racing 4; Bella Vista 0 Nacional 1.

URUGUAY – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
C Espanol	4	3	1	0	9	2	10
Defensor	4	3	0	1	8	4	9
Tacuarembo	4	3	0	1	6	4	9
Racing	4	2	2	0	8	4	8
Rampla	4	2	2	0	5	3	8
Fenix	4	2	1	1	4	5	7
Danubio	4	2	0	2	7	7	6
Liverpool	4	1	2	1	6	4	5
Bella Vista	4	1	1	2	5	4	4
Nacional	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
M Misiones	4	1	1	2	6	7	4
Penarol	3	1	1	1	3	5	4
Cerro	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Wanderers	4	0	1	3	3	6	1
Tanque Sisley	2	0	0	2	1	3	0
River Plate	4	0	0	4	3	12	0

15-round tournament (15x1)

VENEZUELA

Clausura

Feb 2: El Vigia 1 Caracas 0.
Feb 5: Carabobo 0 Tachira 2.
Feb 6: El Vigia 1 Esppor 0; Lara 3 Petare 0; Monagas 4 Caroni 0; Venezuela 3 Estudiantes 0; Caracas 0 Yaracuyanos 1; Zulia 0 Aragua 4; Mineros 3 Trujillanos 1; Zamora 1 Anzoategui 1.
Feb 12: Petare 1 El Vigia 0.
Feb 13: Estudiantes 0 Monagas 0; Yaracuyanos 2 Venezuela 0; Trujillanos 1 Carabobo 0; Aragua 2 Caroni 1; Esppor 1 Zulia 0; Anzoategui 2 Lara 1; Mineros 3 Zamora 1.
Feb 19: Venezuela 3 Tachira 2; Caroni 1 Estudiantes 1; Zamora 2 Carabobo 2.
Feb 20: El Vigia 1 Anzoategui 1; Aragua 0 Esppor 1; Caracas 1 Trujillanos 0; Monagas 4 Yaracuyanos 1; Lara 2 Mineros 2; Zulia 1 Petare 0.
Feb 23: El Vigia 1 Mineros 3; Yaracuyanos 0 Caroni 0; Tachira 1 Monagas 0; Trujillanos 3 Venezuela 0; Carabobo 2 Caracas 2; Esppor 1 Estudiantes 0; Petare 1 Aragua 1; Anzoategui 1 Zulia 0; Zamora 3 Lara 1.
Feb 27: Estudiantes 0 Yaracuyanos 0; El Vigia 0 Zamora 3; Zulia 2 Mineros 1; Aragua 0 Anzoategui 0; Monagas 1 Trujillanos 1; Caracas 1 Lara 0; Esppor 0 Petare 0.

VENEZUELA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anzoategui	8	4	4	0	7	3	16
Zamora	7	4	2	1	12	7	14
Caracas	8	4	2	2	9	7	14
Esppor	8	4	2	2	6	4	14
Mineros	8	4	1	3	16	12	13
El Vigia	10	4	1	5	14	13	13
Yaracuyanos	8	3	4	1	7	6	13
Monagas	8	3	3	2	12	5	12
Tachira	7	4	0	3	9	6	12
Aragua	8	3	2	3	8	5	11
Trujillanos	8	3	2	3	9	8	11
Zulia	8	3	1	4	6	13	10
Carabobo	7	2	3	2	11	10	9
Lara	8	2	2	4	8	9	8
Venezuela	7	2	1	4	6	13	7
Petare	7	1	3	3	3	7	6
Caroni	7	0	4	3	5	12	4
Estudiantes	8	0	3	5	4	12	3

17-round tournament (17x1); the 2 teams with fewest points in combined apertura/clausura table will be relegated

CONCACAF

MEXICO

Clausura

Regular season

Feb 2: America 3 San Luis 0.
Feb 4: Necaxa 0 Morelia 0.
Feb 5: Monterrey 2 Pachuca 0; Guadalajara 2 Atlante 0; Santos 0 Tigres 2; Cruz Azul 2 Jaguares 0; San Luis 3 Tecos 2.
Feb 6: Puebla 0 Pumas 1; Toluca 0 Atlas 0; America 3 Queretaro 1.
Feb 11: Necaxa 1 America 0.
Feb 12: Queretaro 0 Toluca 5; Jaguares 1 Monterrey 4; Tigres 2 Cruz Azul 0; Pachuca 1 Puebla 0; Atlas 1 Santos 2; Atlante 0 San Luis 0.
Feb 13: Morelia 4 Tecos 1; Pumas 1 Guadalajara 1.
Feb 18: Tecos 0 Atlante 1; San Luis 0 Pumas 1.
Feb 19: Santos 0 Queretaro 2; Guadalajara 4 Pachuca 1; Cruz Azul 2 Atlas 1; Monterrey 0 Tigres 0.
Feb 20: Toluca 2 Necaxa 3; Puebla 1 Jaguares 0; America 1 Morelia 2.
Feb 25: Necaxa 1 Santos 0.
Feb 26: Queretaro 1 Cruz Azul 1; Jaguares 1 Guadalajara 0; Tigres 3 Puebla 0; Pachuca 0 San Luis 0; Atlas 1 Monterrey 0.
Feb 27: Morelia 2 Atlante 1; Pumas 5 Tecos 1; America 4 Toluca 3.

MEXICO – CLAUSURA: REGULAR – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tigres	8	5	2	1	12	4	17
Guadalajara	8	2	4	2	10	7	10
Monterrey	8	3	1	4	11	10	10
Necaxa	8	3	1	4	5	6	10
Santos	8	3	1	4	7	11	10
Tecos	8	2	0	6	9	21	6

MEXICO – CLAUSURA: REGULAR – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atlas	8	4	1	3	11	7	13
America	9	4	1	4	16	13	13
San Luis	9	3	4	2	12	10	13
Toluca	8	3	3	2	14	8	12
Atlante	8	3	1	4	8	7	10
Pachuca	8	2	3	3	5	11	9

MEXICO – CLAUSURA: REGULAR – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pumas	8	5	3	0	17	8	18
Morelia	8	4	3	1	15	12	15
Cruz Azul	8	4	2	2	16	11	14
Queretaro	8	2	2	4	8	16	8
Jaguares	8	2	1	5	6	13	7
Puebla	8	2	1	5	4	11	7

17-round regular season (17x1); top 2 in each group and the 2 other teams with most points, regardless of group, will enter championship play-offs; the team with worst average points over 3 most recent seasons will be relegated

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - Jan 28-30; 2nd legs - Feb 11-27

APR (Rwa) v Club Africain (Tun)**
2-2
AS FAN (Ngr) v JC Abidjan (IvC)
0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
ASEC Abidjan (IvC) v Cansado (Mta)
7-0, 2-0 (agg 9-0)
ASPAC (Ben) v Mongomo (EqG)
1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Diaraf (Sen) v Ports Authority (Gam)
1-1, 2-0 (agg 3-1)
East End Lions (SLe) v Djoliba (Mli)**
0-2
Elan Mitsoudje (Com) v Simba SC (Tan)
0-0, 2-4 (agg 2-4)
Fello Star (Gui) v ASFA Yennenga (BuF)
1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4)
Mighty Barolle (Lbr) v Kano Pillars (Nga)
0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3)
Motor Action (Zim) v CNaPS Sport (Mad)
0-1, 1-0 (agg 1-1; Motor Action 4-3 on pens)
Ocean View (Zan) v AS Vita (DRC)
1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4)
Raja Casablanca (Mor) v Tourbillon (Chd)*
10-1
Real Bangui (CAR) v Mouloudia (Alg)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Recreativo Caala (Ang) v Saint George (Eth)
2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Saint Michel (Con) v Enyimba (Nga)
0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
SuperSport United (SAf) v Matlama (Les)
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)
Ulinzi Stars (Ken) v Zamalek (Egy)
0-4, 0-1 (agg 0-5)
US Bitam (Gab) v Les Astres (Cam)**
0-0
Vital'O (Bdi) v Cotonsport (Cam)**
2-2

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Winner...Roar's Henrique (right)

AUSTRALIA

Roar into Grand Final

Brisbane Roar extended their unbeaten run to 27 games as they came from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 with Central Coast Mariners and book their place in the A-League Grand Final with a 4-2 aggregate victory.

Brisbane will now host its first Grand Final since 1997 - when Brisbane Strikers won the former National Soccer League decider against Sydney United - when the Roar take on either Central Coast Mariners or Gold Coast United on March 13.

Wellington Phoenix's Danny Vukovic became the first goalkeeper to score in the A-League as his last-minute penalty secured the final play-off place for the New Zealand club with a 3-1 win over North Queensland Fury.

Next season's A-League will feature just 10 teams after North Queensland Fury were axed for failing to make assurances about their financial viability.

Fury joined the competition in August 2009 but were immediately under financial strain, despite strong support for the sport in the region.

JAPAN

Keeper is cup hero

Former international goalkeeper Seigo Narazaki saved three spot-kicks as Nagoya Grampus beat Kashima Antlers 3-1 on penalties in the season-opening Super Cup. Takahiro Masukawa had opened the scoring for Grampus before Takuya Nozawa equalised.

Wydad Casablanca (Mor) v Aduana Stars (Gha)
3-0, 0-1 (agg 3-1)
Young Buffaloes (Swa) v St Michel Utd (Sey)
3-0, 1-2 (agg 4-2)
Zesco United (Zam) v Liga Muculmana (Moz)
3-0, 1-2 (agg 4-2)

InterClube (Ang) v Township Rollers (Bot) – Rollers withdrew; InterClube went through
**Tourbillon withdrew after 1st leg; Raja went through*
***2nd leg still to be played*

Byes to 1st round: Al Ahly (Egy), Al Hilal (Sud), Al Ittihad (Lby), Al Merreikh (Sud), Dynamos (Zim), ES Setif (Alg), Esperance (Tun), Stade Malien (Mli), TP Mazembe (DRC; holders)

1st round draw

Al Ahly v SuperSport United
Al Hilal v Recreativo Caala
Al Ittihad v JC Abidjan
Al Merreikh v InterClube
APR OR Club Africain v Zamalek
AS Vita v *Vital'O OR Cotonsport*
Diaraf v *East End Lions OR Djoliba*
Dynamos v Mouloudia
ES Setif v ASFA Yennenga
Esperance v ASPAC
Motor Action v ASEC Abidjan
Stade Malien v Raja Casablanca
TP Mazembe v Simba SC
US Bitam OR Les Astres v Enyimba
Wydad Casablanca v Kano Pillars
Zesco United v Young Buffaloes

1st legs - March 18-20; 2nd legs - April 1-3

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - Jan 28-30; 2nd legs - Feb 11-27
AS Adema (Mad) v Maxaquene (Moz)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1; AS Adema on away goals)
AS Aviacao (Ang) v Sofapaka (Ken)
0-0, 0-0 (agg 0-0; Sofapaka 5-4 on pens)
CA Batna (Alg) v Al Nasr (Lby)
2-2, 2-2 (agg 4-4; Al Nasr 6-5 on pens)
Centre Salif Keita (Mli) v Difaa El Jadida (Mor)
2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3; Difaa El Jadida on away goals)
Diplomate (CAR) v Tiko United (Cam)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Dynamic Togolais (Tog) v Sahel (Ngr)
0-0, 0-0 (agg 0-0; Sahel 4-2 on pens)
Foullah Edifice (Chd) v Ela Nguema (EqG)
2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Fovou Baham (Cam) v USFA (BuF)
2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4)
Highlanders (Zim) v Nchanga Rangers (Zam)
1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4)
KMKM (Zan) v Motema Pembe (DRC)
0-4, 0-2 (agg 0-6)
Leopards (Con) v Etincelles (Rwa)
1-1, 2-0 (agg 3-1)
Mbabane Highlanders (Swa) v Victors (Uga)
1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2; Victors 4-1 on pens)
Missile (Gab) v Inter Star (Bdi)
4-0, 4-1 (agg 8-1)
Sequence (Gui) v Africa Sports (IvC)
0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)
Sewe Sport (IvC) v Ashanti Gold (Gha)
0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
Sainte-Marienne (Reu) v Wits (SAf)
1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)
Tevragh Zeina (Mta) v Real Bamako (Mli)
0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Toure Kunda Footpro (Sen) v Ports Authority (SLe)
2-1, 2-2 (agg 4-3)
USS Krake (Ben) v Maghreb Fes (Mor)
1-1, 1-4 (agg 2-5)
Young Africans (Tan) v Dedebit (Eth)
4-4, 0-2 (agg 4-6)

Byes to 1st round: Al Khartoum (Sud), Al Nil (Sud), Etoile Sahel (Tun), FUS Rabat (Mor), Haras Hedood (Egy), Ismaili (Egy), JS Kabylie (Alg), Kaduna United (Nga), Olympique Beja (Tun), Primeiro Agosto (Ang), St Eloi Lupopo (DRC), Sunshine Stars (Nga)

1st round draw

Africa Sports v USFA
Al Khartoum v Al Nasr
Al Nil v Missile
Etoile Sahel v Ashanti Gold
FUS Rabat v Toure Kunda Footpro
Haras Hedood v Dedebit
Ismaili v Sofapaka
JS Kabylie v Tevragh Zeina
Kaduna United v Foullah Edifice
Maghreb Fes v Sahel
Olympique Beja v Difaa El Jadida
Primeiro Agosto v Leopards
St Eloi Lupopo v Nchanga Rangers
Sunshine Stars v Tiko United
Victors v Motema Pembe
Wits v AS Adema

1st legs - March 18-20; 2nd legs - April 1-3

EGYPT

EGYPT	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zamalek	15	9	5	1	28	17	32
Ismaili	15	9	2	4	27	19	29
Al Shorta	15	7	5	3	17	9	26
ENPPI	15	8	2	5	23	18	26
Al Ahly	15	6	8	1	18	14	26
Petrojet	15	7	4	4	20	15	25
Al Masry	15	5	5	5	16	14	20
Entag Harby	15	5	5	5	21	21	20
ML Makasa	15	4	6	5	20	19	18
Al Jaish	15	4	6	5	16	20	18
Haras Hedood	15	4	5	6	17	23	17
Al Gouna	15	3	6	6	10	14	15
Smouha	15	2	7	6	17	19	13
Mokawloon	15	2	6	7	13	21	12
Wadi Degla	15	3	3	9	18	28	12
Al Ittihad	15	2	5	8	19	29	11

Standings on March 1
30-round season (15x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

MOROCCO

MOROCCO	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maghreb	18	9	7	2	21	11	34
Olympic Safi	18	9	7	2	17	10	34
Olympique K	19	9	6	4	20	11	33
Raja	18	9	5	4	24	14	32
Hassania	19	7	7	5	17	14	28
Wydad C	18	6	9	3	14	10	27
FUS	19	5	12	2	16	13	27
JSM	19	7	5	7	17	22	26
FAR	19	5	8	6	17	16	23
Moghreb	19	5	7	7	16	18	22
Wydad Fes	19	5	6	8	14	19	21
Chabab	19	3	10	6	11	14	19
Difaa	19	3	9	7	14	17	18
Kawkab	19	2	11	6	14	17	17
KAC	19	3	8	8	8	16	17
Kasba Tadla	19	2	5	12	10	28	11

Standings on March 1
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

NIGERIA

NIGERIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dolphins	17	12	1	4	17	7	37
Sunshine Stars	16	10	2	4	23	10	32
Bukola Babes	17	9	3	5	19	13	30
Warri Wolves	17	8	5	4	20	12	29
Sharks	17	8	5	4	21	20	29
Kaduna Utd	17	7	6	4	18	14	27
Kano Pillars	17	8	3	6	18	15	27
Enugu Rangers	16	8	2	6	19	12	26
Kwara Utd	17	8	2	7	15	13	26
Enyimba	16	8	1	7	15	13	25
Ocean Boys	17	7	2	8	21	19	23
Heartland	16	7	2	7	16	14	23
Lobi Stars	16	7	2	7	15	17	23
Shooting Stars	17	6	4	7	18	16	22
Gombe Utd	17	5	3	9	13	22	18
N Tornadoes	17	3	8	6	10	16	17
Zamfara Utd	16	4	3	9	13	27	15
Crown	17	4	2	11	13	21	14
Plateau Utd	17	3	4	10	14	25	13
JUTH	17	2	6	9	11	23	12

Standings on March 1
38-round season (19x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Orlando P'tes	22	13	7	2	30	14	46
Ajax CT	22	14	4	4	34	21	46
Kaizer Chiefs	22	13	5	4	33	18	44
Mamelodi S	22	13	2	7	35	17	41
Bloemfontein	22	9	9	4	27	17	36
Santos	22	7	9	6	26	26	30
Wits	22	8	5	9	36	28	29
Free State	22	6	10	6	19	22	28
AmaZulu	22	5	11	6	34	32	26
Golden Arrows	22	7	5	10	25	27	26
Platinum Stars	22	5	10	7	21	24	25
Vasco	22	6	7	9	24	32	25
SuperSport	22	6	6	10	17	29	24
Maritzburg	22	5	6	11	19	32	21
Moroka S	22	4	6	12	16	31	18
Mpumalanga	22	3	2	17	15	41	11

Standings on March 1
30-round season (15x2); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

TUNISIA

TUNISIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esperance	14	10	2	2	23	12	32
Etoile Sahel	14	10	1	3	24	10	31
CS Sfaxien	14	6	5	3	13	10	23
Stade Tunisien	14	5	5	4	15	15	20
Club Africain	14	4	7	3	20	17	19
Hammam-Lif	14	5	4	5	13	14	19
Zarzis	14	5	3	6	13	11	18
Bizertin	14	5	3	6	10	11	18
Kairouanaise	14	5	3	6	14	16	18
Ham-Sousse	14	4	4	6	10	15	16
Marsa	14	3	6	5	12	15	15
Gabes	14	4	2	8	9	15	14
Gafsa	14	3	4	7	15	23	13
Olympique	14	1	7	6	8	15	10

Standings on March 1
26-round season (13x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary stage

1st preliminary round
Feb 12: Al Sadd (Qat) 5 Al Ittihad (Syr) 1; Sriwijaya (Ins) 2 Muangthong Utd (Tha) 2 (aet; Sriwijaya 7-6 on pens).
Winners qualified for 2nd preliminary round; losers entered AFC Cup at group stage

2nd preliminary round
Feb 18: Al Sadd 2 Dempo (Ind) 0; Sriwijaya 0 Al Ain (UAE) 4.
Winners qualified for group stage; losers entered AFC Cup at group stage

Group stage draw & schedule

Group A
Al Gharafa (Qat)
Al Hilal (Sau)
Al Jazira (UAE)
Sepahan (Irn)

Mar 1 Al Hilal v Sepahan
Al Jazira v Al Gharafa
Mar 15 Al Gharafa v Al Hilal
Sepahan v Al Jazira
Apr 5 Al Hilal v Al Jazira
Sepahan v Al Gharafa
Apr 20 Al Gharafa v Sepahan
Al Jazira v Al Hilal
May 4 Al Gharafa v Al Jazira
Sepahan v Al Hilal
May 11 Al Hilal v Al Gharafa
Al Jazira v Sepahan

Group B
Al Nassr (Sau)
Al Sadd (Qat)
Esteghlal (Irn)
Pakhtakor (Uzb)

Mar 1 Esteghlal v Al Sadd
Pakhtakor v Al Nassr
Mar 15 Al Nassr v Esteghlal
Mar 16 Al Sadd v Pakhtakor
Apr 5 Al Sadd v Al Nassr
Apr 6 Esteghlal v Pakhtakor
Apr 19 Al Nassr v Al Sadd
Pakhtakor v Esteghlal
May 3 Al Sadd v Esteghlal
May 4 Al Nassr v Pakhtakor
May 11 Esteghlal v Al Nassr
Pakhtakor v Al Sadd

Group C
Al Ittihad (Sau)
Al Wahda (UAE)
Bunyodkor (Uzb)
Persepolis (Irn)

Mar 2 Al Ittihad v Persepolis
Al Wahda v Bunyodkor
Mar 16 Bunyodkor v Al Ittihad
Persepolis v Al Wahda
Apr 5 Al Wahda v Al Ittihad
Bunyodkor v Persepolis
Apr 20 Al Ittihad v Al Wahda
Persepolis v Bunyodkor
May 3 Bunyodkor v Al Wahda
Persepolis v Al Ittihad
May 10 Al Ittihad v Bunyodkor
Al Wahda v Persepolis

KUWAIT

Kuwait hit heights

Ali Al Kandari scored the winner as Kuwait SC beat Al Nasr 1-0 to go top of the table, above Al Qadsia who drew 0-0 with Kazma.

SAUDI ARABIA

Al Hilal stay top

Al Hilal remain top of the table, eight points clear of second-place Ittihad, after a 2-1 victory over Al Fateh.

SINGAPORE

Rovers Charity win

Tampines Rovers collected their first silverware for four years, beating Etoile 2-1 to win the pre-season S.League Charity Shield with goals from 40-year-old striker Aleksandar Duric and 30-year-old former South Korea international Park Yo-seb.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

New league kicks off

The inaugural S-League got under way with Malaita Kingz recording the league's first win – a 2-0 victory against Real Kakamora – with Kingz' Charles Irobina scoring the league's first goal.

Group D

Al Rayyan (Qat)
Al Shabab (Sau)
Emirates (UAE)
Zob Ahan (Irn)

Mar 2	Al Rayyan v Al Shabab
	Zob Ahan v Emirates
Mar 16	Al Shabab v Zob Ahan
	Emirates v Al Rayyan
Apr 6	Al Rayyan v Zob Ahan
	Al Shabab v Emirates
Apr 19	Emirates v Al Shabab
	Zob Ahan v Al Rayyan
May 3	Al Shabab v Al Rayyan
	Emirates v Zob Ahan
May 10	Al Rayyan v Emirates
	Zob Ahan v Al Shabab

Group E

Gamba Osaka (Jap)
Jeju United (SKo)
Melbourne Victory (Aus)
Tianjin Teda (Chn)

Mar 1	Gamba v Melbourne
	Jeju v Tianjin
Mar 15	Melbourne v Jeju
	Tianjin v Gamba
Apr 5	Jeju v Gamba
	Tianjin v Melbourne
Apr 20	Gamba v Jeju
	Melbourne v Tianjin
May 4	Melbourne v Gamba
	Tianjin v Jeju
May 11	Gamba v Tianjin
	Jeju v Melbourne

Group F

Al Ain (UAE)
Hangzhou Greentown (Chn)
Nagoya Grampus (Jap)
Seoul (SKo)

Mar 1	Hangzhou v Nagoya
Mar 2	Al Ain v Seoul
Mar 15	Nagoya v Al Ain
	Seoul v Hangzhou
Apr 6	Hangzhou v Al Ain
	Nagoya v Seoul
Apr 19	Al Ain v Hangzhou
	Seoul v Nagoya
May 4	Nagoya v Hangzhou
	Seoul v Al Ain
May 11	Hangzhou v Seoul
	Al Ain v Nagoya

Group G

Arema (Ins)
Cerezo Osaka (Jap)
Jeonbuk Motors (SKo)
Shandong Luneng (Chn)

Mar 2	Cerezo v Arema
	Jeonbuk v Shandong
Mar 16	Arema v Jeonbuk
	Shandong v Cerezo
Apr 5	Arema v Shandong
	Cerezo v Jeonbuk
Apr 20	Jeonbuk v Cerezo
	Shandong v Arema
May 3	Arema v Cerezo
	Shandong v Jeonbuk
May 10	Cerezo v Shandong
	Jeonbuk v Arema

Group H

Kashima Antlers (Jap)
Shanghai Shenhua (Chn)
Suwon Bluewings (SKo)
Sydney (Aus)

Mar 2	Shanghai v Kashima
	Sydney v Suwon
Mar 16	Kashima v Sydney
	Suwon v Shanghai
Apr 6	Suwon v Kashima
	Sydney v Shanghai
Apr 19	Kashima v Suwon
	Shanghai v Sydney
May 3	Kashima v Shanghai
	Suwon v Sydney
May 10	Shanghai v Suwon
	Sydney v Kashima

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AFC CUP

Group stage draw

Group A

Al Ansar (Leb)
Al Tilal (Yem)
Dempo (Ind)
Nasaf (Uzb)

Group B

Al Ittihad (Syr)
Al Qadsia (Kuw)
Al Saqr (Yem)
Shurtan (Uzb)

Group C

Al Faisaly (Jor)
Al Jaish (Syr)
Al Nasr (Kuw)
Duhok (Irq)

Group D

Al Suwaiq (Oma)
Al Talaba (Irq)
Al Wehdat (Jor)
Kuwait SC (Kuw)

Group E

Al Ahed (Leb)
Al Arouba (Oma)
Al Karamah (Syr)
Arbil (Irq)

Group F

Song Lam Nghe An (Vie)
Sriwijaya (Ins)
TSW Pegasus (HK)
VB (Mdv)

Group G

Hanoi T&T (Vie)
Muangthong United (Tha)
Tampines Rovers (Sin)
Victory SC (Mdv)

Group H

Chonburi (Tha)
East Bengal (Ind)
Persipura Jayapura (Ins)
South China (HK)

Matchdays:
March 1/2; March 15/16; April 12-14; April 20/26/27; May 3/4; May 10/11

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AUSTRALIA

Regular season

Feb 2: Melbourne Victory 2 Newcastle 0; Gold Coast 0 Adelaide 0.
Feb 4: Melbourne Heart 1 Central Coast 1.
Feb 5: Adelaide 0 Wellington Phoenix 1.
Feb 6: Newcastle 1 Sydney 1; Perth 1 Gold Coast 2.
Feb 8: North Queensland 1 Brisbane 2; Sydney 2 Wellington Phoenix 0; Gold Coast 1 Central Coast 3.
Feb 10: Newcastle 4 Perth 0.
Feb 11: Adelaide 2 Melbourne Victory 1.
Feb 12: Melbourne Heart 2 Sydney 2; Brisbane 4 Gold Coast 0.
Feb 13: Wellington Phoenix 3 North Queensland 1; Central Coast 1 Newcastle 0.

AUSTRALIA – REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brisbane	30	18	11	1	58	26	65
Central Coast	30	16	9	5	50	31	57
Adelaide	30	15	5	10	51	36	50
Gold Coast	30	12	10	8	40	32	46
Melbourne V	30	11	10	9	45	39	43
Wellington P	30	12	5	13	39	41	41
Newcastle	30	9	8	13	29	33	35
Melbourne H	30	8	11	11	32	42	35
Sydney	30	8	10	12	35	40	34
Perth	30	5	8	17	27	54	23
N Queensland	30	4	7	19	28	60	19

Top 6 entered championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

Elimination finals

Feb 18: Adelaide 1 Wellington Phoenix 0.
Feb 20: Gold Coast 1 Melbourne Victory 0.
Winners qualified for minor semi-final; losers eliminated

Minor semi-final

Feb 27: Adelaide 2 Gold Coast 3.
Gold Coast qualified for preliminary final; Adelaide eliminated

Major semi-final

1st leg - Feb 19; 2nd leg - Feb 26
Central Coast v Brisbane 0-2, 2-2 (agg 2-4)
Brisbane qualified for Grand Final; Central Coast entered preliminary final

IRAN

IRAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zob Ahan	24	14	6	4	37	19	48
Esteghlal	24	12	8	4	40	30	44
Sepahan	23	11	10	2	38	19	43
Teraktor Sazi	24	11	8	5	28	17	41
Persepolis	24	12	4	8	32	29	40
Mes	24	10	8	6	30	22	38
Foolad	24	8	9	7	40	28	33
Saba	24	8	9	7	30	25	33
Sanat Naft	23	10	2	11	26	31	32
Malavan	24	7	9	8	22	25	30
Saipa	24	7	7	10	32	35	28
Rah Ahan	24	7	7	10	22	28	28
Peykan	24	8	3	13	26	38	27
Shahin	24	5	9	10	23	27	24
Naft Tehran	24	4	12	8	23	29	24
Shahrdari	24	5	9	10	29	40	24
Pas	24	4	9	11	20	33	21
Steel Azin	24	4	7	13	19	42	19

Standings on March 1
34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

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THE GREAT TEAMS

Real Madrid 1960

They demolished Eintracht Frankfurt to win a fifth European Cup – and opened many people's eyes to the wider European game

Mighty white...Di Stefano scores Madrid's second

The coverline on the launch edition of *World Soccer* in October 1960 said it all. "Real Madrid – The Greatest".

Today, more than 50 years later, many would argue that that claim still runs true.

No team has done more to ensure the status of the European Cup as the world's foremost club competition than the Real Madrid side that won the trophy five times in a row from the launch of the competition in 1955.

The sequence culminated in the Spanish giants' 7-3 demolition of Eintracht Frankfurt at Glasgow's Hampden Park on the evening of May 18, 1960. The crowd of 134,000 included a teenage Alex Ferguson, who would later recall how Madrid's exhibition football that night opened up his eyes to the wider European game.

Alfredo Di Stefano and Ferenc Puskas were the stars of the show. Both were at the peak of their powers and they combined brilliantly, with Puskas scoring a then-record 12 goals in the season's competition. They were superbly supported by Francisco Gento, Jose Santamaria and the hard-working inside-right Luis Del Sol.

The mastermind of Madrid's success throughout the 1950s and early 1960s was club president Santiago Bernabeu. He presided over the building of the Chamartin stadium that now bears his name and oversaw the controversial hiring of Di Stefano from under the noses of Barcelona in 1953. WS

THE COACH AND HIS TEAM

Miguel Munoz
The tall, powerful captain of the 1956 and 1957 European Cup-winning sides was appointed coach in 1959 and became the youngest boss to win the European Cup, in 1960. He remained in charge until 1974 and later coached the Spain national side.

The formation
Madrid played a WM formation but Marquitos was an attacking-style right-back always looking to break forward. Zarraga was the defensive left-half. Vidal and Del Sol were the worker ants in the midfield spine, with Di Stefano going wherever he liked from a nominal deep centre-forward position.

Gento played deeper on the left than Canario on the right because he wanted space in which to outpace his marking full-back on the outside.

THE FIRST XI

Rogelio Dominguez
Goalkeeper
Argentinian who had a lengthy coaching career back in his native country. Died in 2004.

Jose Santamaria
Defender
Uruguayan centre-half, nicknamed "The Wall", who coached hosts Spain at the 1982 World Cup.

Marquitos
Defender
Right-back in Madrid's five successive European Cup wins. Bolton's Marcos Alonso is his grandson.

Pachin
Defender
Left-back who won eight caps for Spain and went on to coach a number of Spanish clubs.

Jose Maria Vidal
Midfielder
Hard worker who played four times for the Spanish national side. Later played in Holland and the USA.

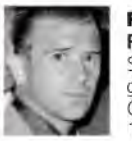
Luis Del Sol
Midfielder
Inside-right who went on to have a lengthy playing career in Italy, with Juventus and Roma.

Jose Maria Zarraga
Midfielder
Left-half who won five European Cups from 1956 to 1960. Coached Malaga and Murcia.

Alfredo Di Stefano
Attacking midfielder
Considered to be one of the greatest players of all-time. Madrid's honorary president since 2000.

Francisco Gento
Forward
Left-winger who is the only man to have won six European Cups. Now an ambassador for Madrid.

Canario
Forward
Brazilian winger, capped seven times by his country, who went on to play for Real Zaragoza.



Ferenc Puskas
Forward
Scored 84 goals in 85 games for Hungary. Coached Panthanaikos in 1971 European Cup Final.

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